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Birkbeck, University of London

Imagining Enlightenment: Buddhism and Kipling's *Kim*

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2017

Declaration

I, Susan Karin Paskins, declare that this thesis is all my own work.

Signed declaration.....

Date.....

Abstract

In this thesis I situate Kipling's shaping of Buddhist ideas in *Kim* against the background of Victorian constructions of the religion, deriving from scholarly, popular, Christian and theosophical positions. Kipling's presentation of the lama in *Kim* challenges many of these interpretations since Kipling fashions himself as one who 'knows' about Buddhism, just as he claims to be one of the 'native-born' who understands India. I trace Kipling's hostility to the missionary endeavour and also show his deep-rooted antagonism to theosophy, as manifest in three of his short stories as well as in *Kim*. Comparing *Kim* and *The Light that Failed*, I show that both novels deal with Kipling's childhood experiences in Southsea, the one imagining the adult he could have been, and the other a fantasy of what life could have been like had he stayed in India and fully immersed himself in its religious life. Kipling's biographical self-positioning thus motivates various degrees of resistance to and recrafting of the Victorian construction of Buddhism. The thesis presents a reading of *Kim* in which consideration of its religious ideas takes precedence over the post-colonialist analysis that has dominated critical approaches to the novel in recent decades.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the religious context of one important novel, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901). My aim is to provide a revisionist reading which gives due weight to its presentation of Buddhist ideas, something that has been little studied despite the substantial literature on Kipling and this popular work.¹ The thesis will also contribute to a growing field of work concerned with the impact that the discovery of Buddhism had on Victorian culture in the late nineteenth century.

I first encountered Kipling's writings as a child growing up in London in the 1950s. The book that caught my imagination was *The Jungle Book* (1894), in which my favourite character was the valiant mongoose Rikki Tikki Tavi who protected an English family living in India against dangerous cobras. This story offered a glimpse of life in a land completely foreign to me, but one where my family had strong connections, since my father and grandfather were both born in northern India in the time of the British Raj. However, influenced by my father's socialism and by George Orwell's view of Kipling as a 'jingo imperialist', I did not read Kipling again for many years, until, as part of a Master's degree in Victorian Studies, I became interested in Kipling's presentation of the anxieties of Empire in some of his Indian short stories.² This led me to *Kim* for the first time, and, like many readers, I was enraptured by the novel's portrait of India and its people. *Kim* is by common consent

¹ Three notable examples of critics who do take the Buddhist ideas in the novel seriously are James H. Thrall, 'Immersing the *Chela*: Religion and Empire in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*', *Religion and Literature*, 36 (2004), 45–67; Corinne McCutchan, 'Who is Kim?' in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. by Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 131–54; Christel R. Devadawson, *Reading India Writing England: The Fiction of Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster* (Delhi: Macmillan, 2003). In addition, the Indian critics K. Bhaskara Rao, *Rudyard Kipling's India* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), Vasant A. Shahane, *Rudyard Kipling: Activist and Artist* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1973) and K. Jamiluddin, *The Tropic Sun: Rudyard Kipling and the Raj* (Lucknow: Lucknow University Press, 1974) comment on aspects of Buddhism in the novel. More recently, there are references to Buddhism in *Kim* in Patrick Brantlinger, 'Kim', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kipling* ed. by Howard J. Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 126–40 and Harish Trivedi, 'Introduction' in Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 2011). The edition of *Kim* edited by Máire ní Fhlathúin (Plymouth: Broadview, 2005) has an appendix on 'Buddhism in Victorian Britain'. However none of these critics has an extended discussion of the subject.

² George Orwell, 'Rudyard Kipling', in *In Time's Eye: Essays on Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Jan Montefiore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 28–41 (p. 28). Some of Kipling's short stories which deal with the anxieties of Empire are 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (1885), 'Thrown Away' (1888) and 'At the End of the Passage' (1890).

Kipling's masterpiece, and has been much analysed, particularly by post-colonialist critics following Edward Said's ground-breaking introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel in 1987. However one fact about the numerous critical writings on *Kim* struck me immediately as curious. The central character is of course the boy Kim, but he spends much of the novel as the disciple of a Tibetan Buddhist monk, the lama, and the novel culminates in the description of the religious 'enlightenment' of the lama, a Buddhist term. This part of the novel was invariably almost completely ignored in favour of the overtly political aspect of the book, which takes the form of a spy story set against the background of the 'Great Game', the term given to British manoeuvrings against Russian power in the late nineteenth century.³ Some critics ignored the lama and the religious dimension of the book completely; others dismissed the lama, seeing him as 'selfish' or possessing 'an atrophied absence of adulthood'.⁴ I determined to research the religious context out of which the novel was produced, both to understand what Kipling knew about Buddhism and what he could have expected his early readers to have known, and also to examine what role the lama and his beliefs played in the novel and what Buddhist ideas were employed.

Western engagement with Buddhism proved a vast field to explore. Interest in Eastern religions generally came into European culture in the eighteenth century in a movement that the French writer Raymond Schwab in 1950 termed the 'Oriental Renaissance'.⁵ Schwab's central idea was that the discovery of Sanskrit and ancient Indian religious texts enlarged the thinking of European writers in a way comparable to the Renaissance discovery of the classical world. This fascination with Indian texts was widespread among European thinkers and spread to America, where Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) incorporated Hindu ideas into their thinking.⁶ Until the middle of the nineteenth century, however, Buddhism was not widely known in the West as a

³ For instance the authoritative Norton edition of the novel contains virtually nothing about Victorian perceptions of Buddhism and the way that Kipling uses Buddhist ideas in the novel. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Zohreh T. Sullivan (New York and London: Norton, 2002).

⁴ Alan Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 97; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of British India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 117.

⁵ Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance Orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950).

⁶ There are excellent overviews of this encounter by Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (London: Aquarian, 1994) and J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asia and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).

religion distinct from Hinduism. For instance, the orientalist Sir William Jones (1746–1792), the discoverer of the importance of Sanskrit in the family of Indo-European languages, believed that the Buddha was an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu and so did not recognise Buddhism as a religion in its own right. Emerson himself never made a clear distinction between Hindu and Buddhist ideas. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, advances in philology, the translation of Buddhist texts, archaeological discoveries, and writings by missionaries in Buddhist countries all contributed to a clearer understanding that Buddhism, while it originally arose from Hinduism, was a separate religion.

The key date in the transmission of knowledge about Buddhism to the West was 1844, the year that the great French scholar Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) published *Introduction à L'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, the first and most influential work on the Buddhist religion to be published in the nineteenth century.⁷ Prior to this date there had certainly been contact between Westerners and Buddhists in different countries with Buddhist traditions. Such encounters were documented in travel writings and accounts of missionary endeavours, but there was little awareness before the nineteenth century that all the different Buddhist traditions were actually forms of the same religion, so various were its manifestations. For centuries Western travellers and missionaries encountered ‘Godama’ in Ceylon, ‘Fo’ in China, ‘Boud’ in Tibet, ‘Xaca’ in Japan, and the ninth avatar of Vishnu in India without realising that all these names referred to the historical Buddha.⁸ It was only with the discovery and translation of some of the ancient Buddhist texts in the 1820s and 1830s that knowledge of Buddhism as a religion separate from Hinduism began to clarify in Western consciousness. Burnouf used his own translations of Buddhist Sanskrit texts to compile his monumental work. He also made use of texts discovered by the East India Company employee Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800–1894) in Nepal and Tibetan writings translated by the Russian traveller Alexander de Csoma Koros

⁷ Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844).

⁸ J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 10. Donald Lopez lists 288 names for the Buddha that occurred in European sources before 1800: Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh: a Short History of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 235–37.

(1784–1842).⁹ The Western ‘discovery’ of Buddhism thus depended not on first hand contact with Buddhist beliefs and practices in the East but on the translation of a number of the canonical Buddhist texts.

Burnouf constructed a composite picture of Buddhism and its founder from the texts to which he had access. He analysed various discourses of the Buddha, which were teachings attributed to the historical Buddha, the metaphysical ideas contained in some of the Buddhist writings and key terms such as Nirvana (enlightenment). He (correctly) placed the historical origin of the religion in India, a country from which Buddhism had long vanished. He constructed a portrait of the historical Buddha that ‘would captivate the European imagination for decades’.¹⁰ Burnouf’s historical narrative of Buddhism, in which a pristine origin was followed by ‘baroque elaboration’ and ‘degenerative decline’ was based on an arbitrary and random selection of texts and is now discredited by scholars of Buddhism.¹¹ Nevertheless, his construction of a particular narrative of Buddhism and in particular of its founder as a compassionate man who would preach to all without dogma and ritual was enormously influential in the nineteenth century and beyond. Its cultural reach was considerable.¹²

While Burnouf’s book was not translated into English until the twenty-first century, it nevertheless quickly became established in Britain as an authoritative text, and was supplemented by the work of others. The work of three scholars in particular was of central importance in making Buddhist ideas known to the academic community and to a wider public, a legacy that endures to this day. Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922) was a civil servant in Ceylon where he learnt Pali (the language of some of the earliest manuscripts) from a Buddhist monk.

⁹ For Burnouf and his importance see Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West*; Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ‘Introduction’, in Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, tr. by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Lopez, *From Stone to Flesh*. For Brian Houghton Hodgson see *The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820–1858*, ed. by David M. Waterhouse (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

¹⁰ Lopez, ‘Introduction’ to Burnouf, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 1.

¹¹ Lopez, *From Stone to Flesh*, p. 211.

¹² It was read in America by the Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau and in Germany by Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner, who sketched out an opera on Buddhist themes called *Die Sieger*. Recently the British composer Jonathan Harvey has composed an opera about Wagner’s interest in Buddhism, called *Wagner Dream* (2012).

He became the first Professor of Pali at the University of London from 1882 to 1904 (a post that had no fixed salary) and was then appointed to the first Chair of Comparative Religion in Britain at Manchester University in 1905. Rhys Davids translated numerous Buddhist texts and wrote a number of books on Buddhism, which are notable for their sympathetic and scholarly tone. He founded the Pali Text Society in 1881 (it is still active today) to promote the study of the language and was responsible for the first Pali-English dictionary. As Sandra Bell comments, ‘as a source of unimpeachable scholarship, [the Society] went on to provide institutional support for Buddhism in Britain, while Rhys Davids became Britain’s leading Buddhist scholar, translator, and author of widely read books on Buddhism’.¹³ Rhys Davids was also a founder member of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland in London in 1907.¹⁴ The Sanskrit scholar Max Müller (1823–1900), Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford, was responsible for editing the series of fifty texts, *Sacred Books from the East*, which Oxford University Press published between 1879 and 1910, a monumental publishing enterprise which was instrumental in making Hindu and Buddhist translations available to the general public.¹⁵ Among the Buddhist works that were published were Müller’s own translation of the *Dhammapada* (the sayings of the Buddha) in 1881, used by Edwin Arnold in his poem *The Light of Asia* (1879), and Rhys Davids’ translation of *The Questions of King Milinda* (1891 and 1894), used by Kipling in *Kim*. Important translations from Chinese texts of Buddhist scriptures were made by Samuel Beal (1825–1889), a missionary in China who later became the first Professor of Chinese at University College, London in 1877. Some of these translations were known to Kipling’s father: they are mentioned in *Kim* as being in the Lahore Museum of which he was curator from 1875–1892.

¹³ Sandra Bell, ‘Being Creative with Tradition: Rooting Theravaada Buddhism in Britain’, *Journal of Global Buddhism* (2000), 1–23 (p. 3) <<http://www.globalbuddhism.org.1/bell001.htm>> [accessed 13/04/2011]

¹⁴ For further information on Rhys Davids see L. Ananda Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist: Thomas William Rhys Davids and Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984); Judith Snodgrass, ‘Defining Modern Buddhism: Mr and Mrs Rhys Davids and the Pali Text Society’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27 (2007), 186–202. Rhys Davids’ wife, Caroline, was also a noted Pali scholar.

¹⁵ The most thorough and comprehensive biography of Max Müller is Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: a Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Knowledge about Buddhism did not enter British culture only through academic books and translations. The numbers of newspaper and journal articles about Buddha or Buddhism increased significantly in number between 1850 and 1900, in part responding to scholarly translations. Three relevant publications in the decade 1840–1850 had blossomed to 367 by 1890–1900.¹⁶ Many of these articles explored the differences between Christianity and Buddhism, a debate also sparked by missionary writings in Buddhist countries, which had a marked polemical purpose, to show that Christianity was superior to Buddhism. Discussion about Buddhist ideas in the nineteenth century, then, derived mainly from the translations of ancient texts and concentrated largely on the relation between Christianity and Buddhism. The assessment was often polarised. On the one hand there was widespread admiration for the historical Buddha, particularly for his charity and devotion to his fellow human beings. In this respect he was often compared favourably to Jesus. On the other Buddhism was often denounced as having fallen away from the high ideals of its founder and was thought to be a degenerate religion in need of transformation by the light of the gospel. Furthermore, critics and general readers alike were particularly struck by the similarities between the birth stories of Buddha and Jesus, between Buddhist and Christian ethics, and between Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddhism of Japan and China, and Roman Catholicism. In an age of growing interest in the historical origins of religions, many articles and books were devoted to the question of influence, with most writers deciding that Christianity had influenced Buddhism rather than the other way round.¹⁷ Discussion about Buddhism reflected many of the intellectual and religious concerns of the later Victorian period, about creation and cosmology, theism and atheism, immortality, the possibility of morality without religion, and the nature of religious authority.¹⁸ However there were very few discussions of the religion that did not rely on a comparison of some sort with Christian ideas. Even the American Buddhist sympathiser and freethinker Paul Carus (1852–1919), who promoted inter-faith dialogue in the 1890s, called his presentation of Buddhist ideas *The Gospel of Buddha* (1892), to make explicit the contrast with Christian writings.

¹⁶ Franklin, *Lotus*, p. viii.

¹⁷ For details see Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ Almond, *Discovery*, pp. 140–41.

The first European to style himself a Buddhist seems to have been the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism was widely known in nineteenth-century Europe and particularly so in England. The widespread identification of Buddhism with pessimism that is characteristic of much later nineteenth-century thinking is almost entirely due to Schopenhauer's configuration of the religion.¹⁹ One direction that my research could have taken was to trace the influence of Schopenhauer's construction of Buddhism as a pessimistic philosophy on Victorian culture, but I soon realised that this would be an impossibly wide field of study, and would also take me away from a consideration of Kipling. As we will see in Chapter 4, a careful consideration of *Kim* and its context shows that Kipling's presentation of Buddhist ideas, and in particular his presentation of enlightenment, is in fact far from the pessimistic version of the religion associated with Schopenhauer.

The next stage of my thinking was spurred by reading *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (1988) by the religious historian Philip C. Almond. Almond's important book was the first to trace the different constructions of Buddhism in Britain in the nineteenth century. He argues that Buddhism became a 'reified' religion, in other words one constructed from texts, and that actual Buddhist practices were often seen as degenerate because they differed from what was deemed to be the original form of the religion. This narrative of decay and decadence, as Almond points out, provided a justification for Christian missionary endeavour in Buddhist countries: some missionaries, especially in Ceylon, had as their avowed aim the complete eradication of Buddhism in that country.²⁰ There were other negative constructions of the religion. The concept of Nirvana or enlightenment was almost universally identified with nihilism and greeted with incomprehension; the first noble truth, the fact of suffering, was equated with a philosophy of pessimism; and the lack of belief in a Creator was seen as dangerous atheism. However, as Almond also notes, there were many in the nineteenth century who found Buddhism attractive. There was almost universal praise for the Buddha, seen as the founder of a religion similar to Jesus'

¹⁹ The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and the composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), both widely known and discussed in Victorian Britain, owed their interest in Buddhism to Schopenhauer.

²⁰ In this thesis I use the nineteenth-century names for countries, as is general practice, thus Ceylon for Sri Lanka, Burma for Myanmar, and Siam for Thailand.

founding of Christianity (though the mythological elements of the narratives of the Buddha's life excited less approval). The Buddha's moral code, usually known as the noble eightfold path, also aroused admiration because of its emphasis on active compassion. As I read the articles and books on which Almond had drawn, it became obvious that views about Buddhism in the nineteenth century were highly polarised, and aroused strong passions in Victorian commentators, either of approval or disapproval. This fact underlines an important difference between Victorian culture and our own. Today we tend to look on Buddhist ideas and practices with benevolent approval, seeing the religion as peaceful and other-worldly with none of the doctrinal difficulties of orthodox Christianity or the perceived fanaticism of some elements of Islam. Indeed, Buddhist meditation and the practice of mindfulness are often recommended as forms of stress reduction or therapy to cope with busy lives, an interpretation of Buddhism that the Victorians would certainly not have recognised. One reason for this change in perception is that Victorian writers cast Buddhism in a Christian mould. Whether writing favourably or negatively about the religion, comparisons with Christian ideas always underlie the discussion, in a way which our secular age often does not recognise.

In my first chapter, then, I explore the life and writings of Sir Edwin Arnold (1832–1904), who gave a Christian slant to his long poem about the life and teachings of the historical Buddha, *The Light of Asia* (1879), which was translated into many different languages and is estimated to have sold half a million copies. I argue that Arnold's poem was instrumental in promoting a 'Western' Buddhism, one in which the Buddha was domesticated and Christianised, and I examine his poem in detail to establish that he manipulated his sources to present a Buddha who would be acceptable to Western tastes. One reason for the success of Arnold's poem was that he used an existing literary convention, that of the 'life' of Jesus, familiar to nineteenth-century readers. To make this case I examine two radical reinterpretations of the life of Jesus, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) by David Friedrich Strauss and *The Life of Jesus* (1863) by Ernest Renan, both widely read in the nineteenth century, as well as the theologically conservative rejoinder to Renan, Dean Farrar's *The Life of Christ* (1874). I show how *The Light of Asia* fits into this literary tradition, arguing that *The Light of Asia* was written partly as a rejoinder to

Farrar's conservative portrayal of the Jesus of the gospels. Farrar and Arnold were lifelong friends and the connection between them is well-established.

The importance of this 'Christianising' of the Buddha for *Kim* is that Kipling — very unusually, I will argue — does not follow this trend. If anything, the representation of Christianity in *Kim* is negative, especially in its portrait of the Christian army chaplains, who are portrayed in almost entirely unfavourable terms, and in Kipling's use of a character from one of his early stories, 'Lispeth' (1888), who in that tale is betrayed by Christian missionaries but who reappears in *Kim* as the proud and independent Woman of Shamlegh. A consideration of the cultural context and in particular of Arnold's influential poem allows us to draw an important contrast between the Christianised portrayal of the Buddha in *The Light of Asia* and Kipling's presentation of the lama as a humble follower of the Buddhist way. The Buddhism in *Kim* is configured in non-Christian terms, using key Buddhist ideas such as Nirvana and the role of the bodhisattva. Such a presentation of Buddhist ideas, which is both knowledgeable and admiring, is rare in Victorian culture, and its relationship to Christianity is to furnish a critique. My exploration of Kipling's imaginative presentation of these ideas contributes to an understanding of the diversity of interest in religious beliefs and practices that we find in the later nineteenth century, as well as making a case for the distinctiveness of the novel and of Kipling's fictional enactments of Buddhist ideas and precepts.

In his presentation of the lama in *Kim*, then, Kipling embodies in novelistic characterization a very different response to Buddhist ideas from Arnold. Kipling's poem 'The Buddha at Kamakura' (1892), verses of which he uses as chapter headings in *Kim*, makes an explicit contrast between Buddhism and Christianity and begins to set the imaginative space that the lama in *Kim* will eventually occupy. The lama, though idealised, is not turned into a Christian figure in Kipling's novel. In this respect, we can read *Kim*, in part, as a response to and correction of the popular presentation of Buddhism in *The Light of Asia*.

The favourable reception of his poem led to Arnold's becoming an activist in the Buddhist cause, a response to the Western discovery of Buddhism that is not covered in Philip C. Almond's important book. Arnold was a prime mover in the campaign to restore the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, Bodh-gaya, to Buddhist

control, and he forged links with prominent Buddhists in Ceylon and Japan. I examine the assumptions behind this campaign and analyse it as one example of a kind of dynamic interaction between East and West that has received influential attention from critics. I discuss Mary-Louise Pratt's concept of 'culture zone' and Charles Hallisey's notion of 'heterogeneity of interests' to characterise Arnold's campaign and argue that these formulations are more helpful than J. Jeffrey Franklin's use of the term 'counter-invasion' or Pratt's alternative 'contact zone'.²¹ These last two formulations posit a division between East and West that does not sufficiently characterise the common ground that was found between Western activists in the Buddhist cause, such as Arnold, and Buddhist monks in the East. The importance of Arnold for my thesis, then, is that he was a writer who popularised Buddhism by giving it a Christian slant which Kipling aims to correct with what to him is a more authentic version of the religion.

Archaeological excavations and the proceeds of looting in war resulted in many Buddhist statues and artefacts being displayed in British museums during this period, as I also explore in my first chapter. This was a non-textual source of information that made the religion accessible to a British public in a new way.²² Buddhist statues formed part of the collection of the India Museum, originally set up by the East India Company in 1798 but transferred to the new India Office in 1861. The Museum was moved to Fife House, Whitehall and opened to the public in the same year.²³ The greatest treasure was the Amaravati stupa [burial mound], excavated in 1845 by Sir Walter Elliott and sent to London in 1860. The stupa, which can now be seen in the British Museum, is a large and ancient burial mound onto which figures and images have been carved. There are symbols of the Buddha's birth and enlightenment, namely the lotus, the Bodhi-tree [the tree of enlightenment] and images of a wheel, associated with the wheel of the law in the Buddhist faith. The Buddha is represented both by giant footprints and by images in human form.

²¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6, 7; Charles Hallisey, 'Roads Taken and not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism', in *Curators of the Buddha: the study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 31–61 (p. 33); Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 7.

²² This is an important source for the transmission of Buddhist ideas into Victorian culture which Almond does not discuss.

²³ Ray Desmond, *The India Museum 1801–1879* (London: H. M. S. O., 1982).

There are representations of his birth, enlightenment, teaching, and death, providing the public with a ‘picture Bible of Buddhism’, in the words of Moncure Daniel Conway, the American freethinker.²⁴ The Amaravati stupa was moved to the South Kensington Museum in 1874, where it decorated the principal entrance. It would certainly have been seen by Kipling on his visits to the Museum as a child, visits which he records in his autobiography.²⁵ The timing of these encounters is important. Kipling began to visit the Museum, at which his father had worked from 1860–64, when he was liberated from the ‘House of Desolation’ in Southsea, the repressive and punitive evangelical household in which he spent several years as a child. We know from his autobiography that he was beaten in the ‘House of Desolation’ and ‘introduced to [hell] in all its terrors’.²⁶ Eventually alerted by relatives to the serious effects this treatment was having on the boy’s mental health, Kipling’s mother removed him from Southsea in 1877, aged eleven, and took lodgings for the family in London. Kipling was therefore free to encounter the statues that he saw in the Museum without fear of reprisals from those adults who saw Buddhism as idolatrous. We can infer that the opposition between Buddhism and evangelical Christianity which is presented in Kipling’s writings was formed partly from these experiences in childhood and that his contempt for evangelicals can be attributed to his foster mother’s narrow, cruel, and prejudiced outlook.

Kipling’s father, John Lockwood Kipling, worked at the Lahore Museum, then part of British India, as curator from 1875–1892. This provides a context for Kipling’s experience of Buddhist art and beliefs when he went to India as a journalist aged sixteen.²⁷ Buddhism had been wiped out in India, the country of its birth, by the fourteenth century CE, but in the nineteenth century Western archaeologists began to find out more about the origins of the religion by unearthing material from the time

²⁴ Moncure Daniel Conway, *Travels in South Kensington: with Notes on Decorative Art and Architecture in England* (London: Trubner, 1882). Conway is notable for his sympathetic interest in world religions. He compiled an anthology of inspirational readings from other faiths, entitled *Sacred Anthology: a Book of Ethnical [sic] Scriptures* (London: Trubner, 1874), which he used as minister of the South Place Society.

²⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: for my Friends Known and Unknown* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 20.

²⁶ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 10.

²⁷ For Kipling’s encounters with Buddhism see David Scott, ‘Kipling’s Encounters with Buddhism and the Buddhist Orient: “The Twain Shall Meet”?’ *Cultural History*, 1 (2012), 36–60; David Scott, ‘Kipling, the Orient and Orientalism: “Orientalism” Reorientated?’ *Journal of World History*, 22 (2011), 299–328.

when it still flourished in the subcontinent. Museums in British India began to amass collections of Buddhist statues and artefacts and, in his capacity as curator of the Lahore Museum, Kipling's father knew some of the prominent archaeologists of the time such as Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–93) and Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943). The Museum displayed many Buddhist statues and relics, in particular the kind of Buddhist art known as 'Greco-Buddhist', in which the historical Buddha is displayed in human form and there is discernible influence of Greek sculpture.²⁸ The statues and curator of the Lahore Museum figure prominently in the early pages of *Kim*. Rudyard Kipling lived in Lahore when he left school and became a journalist, and we have evidence from his autobiography that he knew the Buddhist collections in the Lahore Museum well. Kipling also reveals in that work that he accompanied his father to the Paris Exhibition of 1878 where, although he does not mention this, plaster casts from the Cambodian Buddhist site of Angkor Wat were displayed for the first time in Europe. Furthermore, Kipling was one of many Western travellers to Japan when the country began to be opened up following the Meiji reforms of the 1850s, and wrote about his experiences in poetry and prose. The Buddhist context of *Kim* will therefore necessarily involve an exploration of the role of particular statues and relics in Kipling's encounter with, response to, and imaginative construction of the religion.²⁹ This aspect of the religious context of *Kim* is considered further in the first chapter.

Other important areas falling outside of Almond's attention include the influence of Buddhist ideas on popular literature in the later Victorian period, and the importance of the new hybrid religion of theosophy and its attempt to subsume all religions, including Buddhism, into one, a controversial stance that was widely discussed in the periodical press in the 1870s. These are issues discussed in another recent and equally important book, J. Jeffrey Franklin's *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (2008). Franklin examines the popular fiction of

²⁸ Most of the Buddhist sculpture in the Lahore Museum was moved to the Museum in Chandigarh following Partition. A scholarly overview of these sculptures, which are the ones curated by John Lockwood Kipling, can be found in *Gandhara Sculpture in the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh*, ed. by Dr. D. C. Bhattachayya (Chandigarh: Government Museum and Art gallery, 2002).

²⁹ A good overview of the archaeological discoveries of the period is to be found in Charles Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs: the Men who Discovered India's Lost Religion* (London: John Murray, 2002).

Henry Rider Haggard (1856–1825) and Marie Corelli (1855–1925) to excavate the presentation of Buddhist ideas in their novels. He also discusses theosophical ideas at length and provides an analysis of some of the Buddhist ideas in *Kim*. Franklin’s book is one starting point and interlocutor for my thesis. While he does attend to theosophical ideas in the culture of the later nineteenth century, Franklin does not explore Kipling’s engagement with theosophy and his anti-theosophical agenda which, as I argue in Chapter 2, is part of the sub-text of the novel and a key part of its presentation of Buddhist ideas, since the hybrid religion of theosophy attempted to absorb Buddhism into its syncretic system. I therefore trace the founding of theosophy in New York by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–91) and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and examine some of the voluminous writings of theosophists to make the claim that their project was to formulate a new type of Buddhism which they called ‘Esoteric Buddhism’. I explore some of the periodical literature which resisted this appropriation of the Buddhist religion. That Kipling was well aware of this debate is very likely: he knew personally some of the adherents of the theosophical movement when he was living in Simla, and I argue that he makes critical references to their ideas in some of his writings. I go on to suggest that aspects of *Kim* can be read as anti-theosophical, particularly the portrayal of the Tibetan lama and the use of letters in the novel. Further, I interpret the Russian spies in *Kim* as satirical portraits of Blavatsky and Olcott, as Kipling’s way of mocking their pretensions. Satire of theosophy and theosophists was a familiar genre in Victorian Britain. Although there has been recent interest in Kipling’s link with theosophists, there has not as yet been any analysis from critics of an anti-theosophical subtext in Kipling’s writings; I maintain that it is in fact an important part of the religious context of *Kim*.³⁰ I go on to examine some of Kipling’s short stories, ‘The Sending of Dana Da’ (1888), ‘The Finest Story in the World’ (1891), and ‘They’ (1904), which can be fruitfully read — as I do here — as contesting theosophical ideas. My thesis thus both extends and corrects Franklin’s field-defining work.

I conclude the second chapter with an analysis of Kipling’s interest in Freemasonry, a system of belief that seems — superficially, at any rate — to have

³⁰ Andrew Huxley, ‘*Kim*, Theosophy, and Two Ethnologists called Mukherji’, *Kipling Journal*, 357 (2014), 30–43.

elements in common with theosophy. In fact the two systems were configured very differently by Kipling. Freemasonry was seen by him as a tolerant creed which could co-exist with other religious beliefs, whereas theosophy aimed to subsume all religions and systems of thought. As a young man, Kipling was an enthusiastic member of a Masonic Lodge in Lahore, and, although he did not pursue the activity after he left India, the ideals of Freemasonry influenced him in many of his writings, as has been recognised by numerous critics.³¹

There has been much discussion in recent times of the Victorian religious novel and its presentation of issues to do with faith and doubt. In Chapter 3 I conclude that, in its portrayal of faith, *Kim* can be considered a religious novel and in particular can be classed as a religious bildungsroman, a sub-genre of the religious novel that has recently been discussed by Kelsey L. Bennett.³² Understanding the religious bildungsroman as a novel to do with spiritual growth, I link Kim's spiritual development to his confusion about his identity and situate this confusion in the context of Kipling's understanding of the Buddhist concept of anatta, the doctrine of no permanent self. The insight that Kim gains at the end of the novel, when seen in this light, is that preoccupation with the self impedes enjoyment of the world and the ability to live a moral life. Kipling thus locates identity performatively, to adapt Judith Butler's famous formulation: Kim discovers his identity in his loving service to the lama and comes to a moment of insight at the end of the novel which, I argue, should be interpreted in Buddhist terms.³³ Such an insight should be seen as complementary to the lama's vision rather than as opposed, as is the dominant critical interpretation. I build on and extend Franklin's reading of Kim's apotheosis as representing a type of Buddhist meditation.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I examine connections between Kipling's first novel, *The Light that Failed* (1890), and *Kim*, arguing that the two novels present alternative futures for Kipling. *The Light that Failed* imagines the world that Kipling would

³¹ See, for instance, Richard Jaffa, *Man and Mason-Rudyard Kipling* (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2011).

³² Kelsey L. Bennett, *Principle and Propensity: Experience and Religion in the Nineteenth-Century British and American Bildungsroman* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014). Bennett does not discuss Buddhist ideas in nineteenth-century fiction.

³³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

have experienced had he not been rescued from the tyrannical experience of Southsea, and *Kim* explores the free and idyllic life that Kipling could have had if he had remained in India. Reading the two novels together, which has not so far been done by critics, shows their very different attitudes to the world. *The Light that Failed* is strongly influenced by James Thomson's famously pessimistic poem *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874), which Kipling had read at school, and the whole novel is suffused with Thomson's vision of the universe as both hostile and lifeless, with no hope and no faith. Kipling's deeply pessimistic vision in this novel, which has repelled many readers, is due in part to the fact that he allows no place for spirituality or religion. The world of *The Light that Failed* contrasts with the joyful, tolerant world depicted in *Kim*, in which the spiritual search of the lama and his entirely beneficial influence on Kim are taken seriously as matters for fiction. In Chapter 4 I trace the changes in Kipling's life that led to this change in viewpoint, locating them partly in a greater personal happiness following marriage and fatherhood, and partly to a more considered view of belief, perhaps following conversations with the religious philosopher William James in Vermont.

Thomson's philosophy of despair represents a type of discourse that was prevalent in the later part of the nineteenth century and led to a view of Buddhism as pessimistic and nihilistic.³⁴ Kipling counters this trend by presenting the lama's vision of Nirvana as a joyful experience, as I explore in Chapter 4. This vision is intimately linked with the lama's search for the river that takes away sin, a striking idea which, unusually, is not derived by Kipling from Buddhist legends. Instead, he relates the lama's search for the river to ideas about the spiritual path of the bodhisattva, who is a figure of compassion and mercy in Northern Buddhism. I analyse in detail Kipling's account of the lama's enlightenment and his realisation that as a bodhisattva he must postpone his own awakening for the sake of his disciple Kim. Kipling's interest in the spiritual search of holy men in India is also shown in his short story 'The Miracle of Purun Baghat' (1894); I link the portrayal of the Hindu ascetic Purun Bhagat in that story to the presentation of the lama, to show Kipling's valorisation of the Eastern spiritual tradition.

³⁴ For pessimism in Victorian culture, see Nicholas Shrimpton, "'Lane, you're a perfect pessimist': Pessimism and the English Fin-de-Siècle', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (2007), 41–57. For Buddhism construed as pessimistic see Almond, *Discovery*, pp. 80–84.

The structure of *Kim* is related to the Tibetan Buddhist concept of the Wheel of Life, an idea known in Victorian Britain. I show in Chapter 4 that the novel is constructed around the idea of anger, an important negative emotion represented on the Wheel of Life, and that Kipling's exploration of different kinds of violence in the novel is linked to his concerns about masculinity and its role. In *The Light that Failed* he sees masculine friendship between men who have met on the battlefield as the only consolation in a meaningless and loveless world, but in his later novel *Kim* he is concerned with aggression and violence in a different and more questioning way. An important part of the lama's self-discovery is to recognise and overcome the violent impulses within himself in favour of love towards his disciple Kim, and the novel is structured, in part, around such moments of recognition. My thesis thus contributes to scholarship interested in the gender implications of Kipling's writing.

Analysing the religious ideas in *Kim* in depth fits well with recent trends in nineteenth-century scholarship. In the past few years there has been a welcome flourishing of interest in the religious ideas and forms of Victorian literature, as seen in books such as Mark Knight's and Emma Mason's *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: an introduction* (2006), Kirstie Blair's *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (2012), Susan Colon's *Victorian Parables* (2012), Charles LaPorte's *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (2011), and Norman Vance's *Bible and Novel* (2013). However an awareness of the impact on Victorian culture of world religions has been little researched, apart from two excellent studies which do not touch on literary culture. Tomoko Masuzawa, in *The Invention of World Religions: or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), as the subtitle suggests, argues that the development of world religions as a scholarly category helped to reinforce Christian hegemony. Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, in *The Science of Religion in Britain 1860–1915* (2010), examines the interest in eclecticism and pluralism which became a feature of discourse in this period and which meant that debates about religion began to be conducted in relation to other disciplines such as anthropology, history, science, and linguistics. However, much work remains to be done on the impact of the discovery of world religions on literary culture in the nineteenth century. In particular, apart from Franklin's book referred to above, there has been little written about the Victorian fascination with

Buddhism and its manifestation in the popular literature of the late nineteenth century.³⁵

Reading *Kim* today

Since its publication in 1901, *Kim* has delighted readers with its loving and detailed picture of Indian life. Mark Twain, an admirer of Kipling's fiction, read the novel every year; Henry James praised the 'beauty, the quantity, the prodigality, the Ganges-flood' of the book.³⁶ The novel seems to have had a particular appeal to explorers: for instance, Wilfred Thesiger was never without a copy.³⁷ *Kim* was given wide publicity by the founder of the scouting movement Robert Baden-Powell, who wrote a highly truncated summary in his influential *Scouting for Boys* (1908), presenting Kim as a model for the young Boy Scout to emulate, particularly in his observational skills. 'Kim's game', in which objects are memorised and recalled, became a popular children's party game, still played, as I recall, in the 1950s.

The novel continues to have its admirers. It was recently listed as one of the hundred best books of all time on the *Guardian* books page and the online comments reveal that some readers feel a special devotion to the novel: 'one of my five favourite novels – ever. I've re-read it every few years' and 'despite numerous moves around the world, [I] have never been without a copy'.³⁸ The American poet and critic Randall Jarrell cites part of an interview with an unnamed academic who professed to have very little time to read 'at whim', that is, for pleasure, except for an annual rereading of *Kim*, 'not to teach, not to criticize, just for love – he read it, as Kipling wrote it, just because he liked to, wanted to, couldn't help himself'. Jarrell

³⁵ Recently there have been two studies of Buddhist ideas and their impact on literature before and after the Victorian period: Mark S. Lussier, *Romantic Dharma: the Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) which maps the (presumed) emergence of Buddhist ideas into Romantic consciousness, and *Encountering Buddhism in British and American Twentieth Century Literature*, ed. by Lawrence Normand and Alison Winch (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), which contains an interesting collection of essays on writers who proclaimed themselves overtly interested in Buddhism in the twentieth century. Kipling's *Kim*, though published on the cusp of the twentieth century, does not figure, surprisingly.

³⁶ Letter to Rudyard Kipling 30 October 1901, in *Henry James, Selected Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 334.

³⁷ Peter Hopkirk, *Quest for Kim: in Search of Kipling's Great Game* (London: John Murray, 2006), p. 2.

³⁸ Robert McCrum, '100 best novels', <www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/12/100-best-novels> [accessed 25 September 2015]

comments, ‘To him it wasn’t a means to a lecture or an article, it was an end; he read it not for anything he could get out of it, but for itself’.³⁹ This is a kind of rereading that the American writer and academic Patricia Meyer Spacks, quoting Kant, has called ‘a purposiveness without a definite purpose’, ‘a state of mind in which one engages with a book for the second or fifth or eighth time, just for the sake of enjoyment’.⁴⁰

Meyer Spacks distinguishes reading for enjoyment from ‘professional rereading’ in which ‘we direct the text to our purposes rather than give ourselves over to its intents’.⁴¹ This formulation has its problems: what, after all, constitute a text’s ‘intents’ and how would such intents be established? However, Spacks’s formulation of the role of the professional rereaders who ‘direct the text to [their] purposes’ does characterise an important element of the criticism of *Kim* in recent years, its attention from post-colonialist critics, sparked by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and his much-discussed 1987 Penguin edition of the novel. Said expresses his admiration of the book, but ultimately judges it a ‘profoundly embarrassing’ novel.⁴² Said criticises Kipling above all for his lack of awareness of historical change and his portrayal of India as a peaceful and harmonious land with no conflict. Other critics have followed Said’s lead and see the lack of historical awareness in the novel as a culpable omission.⁴³ Homi Bhabha’s essays, collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994), another important moment in the later twentieth-century rethinking of Kipling, present a further influential reading: he sees Kipling’s writings as sites of colonial ambivalence and hybridity, opening the way to discussions of colonial anxiety and of *Kim* as a hybrid figure.⁴⁴ None of these important ‘postcolonial’ readings engages with the religious ideas and context of the

³⁹ Randall Jarrell, ‘Poets, Critics and Readers’, in Randall Jarrell, *No Other Book: Selected Essays*, ed. by Brad Leithauser (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 208–29 (p. 229).

⁴⁰ Meyer Spacks was referring to a conversation she had had with the philosopher John Kaag, who mentioned Kant’s phrase to her. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *On Rereading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 164.

⁴¹ Meyer Spacks, *On Rereading*, pp. 164, 165.

⁴² Edward Said, ‘Introduction’, Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 45.

⁴³ ‘Kipling wilfully ignores Indian politics’, Mark Paffard in *Kipling’s Indian Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 80, is one typical example.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: the Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Don Randall, *Kipling’s Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); John McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space: Rudyard Kipling’s Fiction of the Native-Born* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2002).

novel, however stimulating they have proved to criticism of *Kim*. As a result ideas which were taken seriously in Victorian culture about the importance and worth of Buddhist ideas are ignored and the full force of the novel's presentation of Buddhism is occluded.

How, then, are we to read *Kim* today? In particular, how are we to approach its handling of religious ideas? This thesis is historicist in method, contextualising the novel by exploring the discussion of Buddhist ideas and the encounter with Buddhist relics and statues that form a backdrop to the novel. However this methodology has its limits when it comes to reading the climax of the novel, the lama's experience of Nirvana. Kipling's bold attempt to fictionalise an experience which by its very nature is private and individual raises questions of how narratives of subjective religious experience can be interpreted by the reader. The literary critic Emma Mason has recently written that 'the field of religion and literature is sustained by both measurable analyses, studies that help us to think about how the Victorians practised faith, and experiential attention, in which we think compassionately about their phenomenological belief in God'. She adds that 'there remains a reluctance to study faith positions in earnest without a degree of scepticism', referring to Paul Ricoeur's well-known formulation of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Instead she recommends a 'hermeneutics of kindness', formed on a 'way of reading based on receptivity to the text that refrains from prejudging it within the preconceived formulae that the critic wishes to prove'.⁴⁵ Mason is referring to Victorian texts written by authors with a Christian faith which they express in their writing. The case of *Kim*, though, is different. Kipling is not writing from the position of a practitioner of the Buddhist Dharma; he is, however, presenting a sympathetic and imaginative portrait of a devout Buddhist priest and his gradual realisation of his role as a bodhisattva, as I argue in Chapter 4. My aim is to read this portrayal sympathetically, and to follow Mason's lead in employing a 'hermeneutics of kindness' rather than seeking a reductivist interpretation of the novel which plays down the role of the lama or sees him as 'senile' or talking

⁴⁵ Emma Mason, 'Religion, the Bible, and Literature in the Victorian Age', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. by Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 331–49 (pp. 343, 345, 346).

‘mumbo-jumbo’.⁴⁶ Such a ‘receptivity to the text’ provides a way of reading the novel that gives due weight to Kipling’s seriousness about Buddhist ideas. This reading therefore contributes to the recent growing interest in the reception of Buddhism in Victorian culture and expands and refines Almond’s thesis that the Victorians ‘reified’ Buddhism and presented it as a textual religion.

At the same time it must be admitted that trying to recover the original context of a nineteenth-century novel from a twenty-first century perspective is problematic. As Simon Dentith argues, we are ‘situated beings not only in a basic physical and biological sense, but also in terms of the complex and striated assumptions and understandings of the world that derive from our moment in history and what we inherit from both our near and distant past’.⁴⁷ Understanding is historically conditioned, according to Dentith, and there is no such thing as taking up an ‘objective’ position in response to a novel of the past. Dentith prefers to draw on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and his notion of the ‘re-accentuation’ of a text. Its original context may be lost but other dialogic contexts appear.⁴⁸ It is in this sense, he believes, that we engage with texts of the past.

Dentith is right to sound a note of caution about any project that seeks to situate a novel in its original context without due attention to our own preconceptions and assumptions. However my reading of *Kim* does not aim to do this. It is precisely because there has been a tendency in recent criticism to ignore the religious background of the novel that I seek to explore the context in which the novel was written. I am not arguing that a postcolonial reading is in any sense invalid, but only that other readings are possible, especially if it can be agreed that the religious ideas in the novel are worth serious attention. Readings that start from a secularist position such as that of Edward Said can only be partial.

The novel has often been criticised for its apparent timelessness, and Kipling judged culpably ignorant of the facts of historical change. Such criticism mistakes the genre of the novel. As David Sergeant has recently argued, the novel should be

⁴⁶ Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire*, p. 97; Edward Said, ‘Introduction’ to *Kim*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Simon Dentith, *Nineteenth-Century British Literature Then and Now: Reading with Hindsight* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁸ Dentith, *Reading with Hindsight*, p. 19.

read as an ‘artistic creation’ rather than a ‘historical monograph’.⁴⁹ Sergeant provides a careful and nuanced critique of post-colonial criticism in his book. While recognising the ‘salutary and transformative shock that *Orientalism* administered to prevailing ways of reading’, he argues that any critical reading should at least ‘try to respect the singular particularities of each text’.⁵⁰ Sergeant’s examples of misreadings of *Kim* based on what the critic thinks ought to be included are persuasive, and I agree that the novel should be categorised as an idyll rather than as a realistic portrait of life in India at the end of the nineteenth century, since Kipling’s idealised portrait of the lama contributes to the sense of a utopian land. Sergeant also explores the unspoken assumptions of post-colonial critics that to condemn *Kim* for being ahistorical is in some sense to express nostalgia for empire. Statements such as ‘the persistent popularity of Kipling may now be said to be bound up with a perverse, melancholic desire for Empire or the spirit of Empire’ make assumptions about *Kim* and its readers which cannot be justified on any careful reading of the novel or a study of its reception history.⁵¹ Instead, Sergeant suggests, ‘the idiosyncratic religious-worldly synthesis of *Kim* might be placed in a nineteenth-century Western search for transcendence and fulfilment’.⁵² Sergeant’s attention to close reading and his characterisation of *Kim* as a vision or idyll of what the world could be like have been important for my consideration of the novel. My analysis of the Buddhist background to the novel and its use of Buddhist ideas builds on Sergeant’s reading and gives a precise religious context to his fruitful suggestion that *Kim* can be read as a search for fulfilment.

Buddhist terms: a modern understanding

In this thesis I use the term ‘Buddhism’ a great deal. Two points, initially, need to be clarified. I do not assume that there is an entity called ‘Buddhism’. In fact, early Buddhist traditions did not have words representing the concepts ‘religion’ and ‘Buddhism’. I use the term as shorthand for all the diverse traditions and practices

⁴⁹ David Sergeant, *Kipling’s Art of Fiction, 1884–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 177.

⁵⁰ Sergeant, *Kipling*, p. 189.

⁵¹ ‘Introduction’, *Kipling and Beyond: Patriotism, Globalisation and Postcolonialism*, ed. by Caroline Rooney and Kaori Nagai (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5, quoted in Sergeant, *Kipling*, p. 203.

⁵² Sergeant, *Kipling*, p. 204.

that are to be found in countries where the main religion is Buddhist. Secondly, this thesis is not ‘about’ Buddhism. It explores the ways that Victorian writers in general, and Kipling in particular, configured Buddhism. It is of course a truism that all cultures express ideas in terms of their own values. However, because there is so often a polemical purpose to the discussions of Buddhism in the Victorian period, it is helpful for readers to have at least a brief view of what are now accepted understandings of some key Buddhist terms and traditions. With these to hand, the modern reader who may be unfamiliar with Buddhist concepts will be better able to evaluate some of the discussions of these ideas in the nineteenth century.

There are three main Buddhist traditions, Southern, Eastern, and Tibetan.⁵³ The Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia – formerly known as Hinayana – is the one referred to as ‘Southern’ Buddhism.⁵⁴ It is the most conservative of the Buddhist traditions and is generally thought to be closest in doctrine and practice to ancient Buddhism. For this reason Victorian writers invariably characterise it as ‘pure’ Buddhism and compare other Buddhist religious traditions unfavourably with it. Its canonical language is Pali, an ancient Indian language closely related to Sanskrit. In the nineteenth century many of the Buddhist scriptures written in Pali were translated for the first time, many by the scholar Thomas William Rhys Davids, who founded the Pali Text Society. Eastern Buddhism refers to the traditions of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Its scriptures are preserved in Chinese and Sanskrit, and its religious traditions are known as Mahayana, or ‘Great Vehicle’.

Mahayana Buddhism emerged at about the first century CE following a schism at one of the Buddhist Councils, and arose in part to meet the spiritual needs of the growing number of lay, non-monastic Buddhists. One key difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism is their view of the path to enlightenment, or Nirvana. The ideal in Theravada Buddhism is for the individual to become an

⁵³ The discussion that follows is based on books by two eminent modern scholars of Buddhism, Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵⁴ Theravada means Tradition of the Elders; Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle, a name not now generally used, was the name given to Theravada Buddhism by proponents of the Mahayana tradition.

‘arhat’, a being free of fear and craving and thus free from the cycle of rebirth. On the other hand, it is the ideal of the ‘bodhisattva’ that is important in Mahayana Buddhism. The bodhisattva postpones his (or her) own imminent enlightenment to be able to help all sentient beings to a similar state. Mahayana Buddhism also has a considerably more elaborate cosmology and pantheon than Theravada Buddhism: it grew to encompass Buddhas and bodhisattvas, numerous deities, often borrowed from Hinduism, and guardian figures who act as protectors of the Buddhist Law.

Northern Buddhism or Vajrayana arose in India in about 500 CE. It is a form of Mahayana Buddhism which makes use of tantric (esoteric) doctrine and ritual and which also emphasises the role of the compassionate bodhisattva. About two centuries later this form of Buddhism spread to Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia. Victorian writers knew it as ‘lamaism’, after the Tibetan name for a Buddhist monk, and were generally extremely dismissive of it as a degenerate corruption of ‘pure’ Buddhism, in other words Southern Buddhism, which does not have priests or esoteric practices and possesses the earliest written texts. However different, all these traditions trace their origin to the life of the historical Buddha, Prince Siddhartha, the son of the ruler of the Shakya tribe in the kingdom of Kapilavastu (now in Nepal), who lived in the fifth century BCE. The various Buddhist stories that exist about Siddhartha’s life, enlightenment and teaching were written centuries after his death but some elements of the story are consistent in all the legends.⁵⁵

Shortly after Siddhartha’s birth, the sage Ashita prophesied that he would become either a great king or a great spiritual teacher. Determined that he should become a great ruler, his father confined Siddhartha to the palace where he lived a life of great luxury. Siddhartha married and had a child, but then became disillusioned with his comfortable life. While wandering in his garden he saw an old man, an ill man, and a funeral procession and became aware for the first time of the realities of suffering and death. An encounter with an itinerant monk was crucial in his decision to leave the palace and to become a wandering ascetic, now known as Gautama. He took instruction from various teachers and practised an austere life, but remained unsatisfied until he had a profound religious experience under a pipal tree

⁵⁵ Jatakas are a genre of Buddhist literature in which the Buddha’s previous lives are narrated. They were known to Kipling, as Chapter 4 explores.

at Bodh-Gaya in the modern Indian state of Bihar. He meditated for forty-nine days and on the forty-ninth day attained enlightenment.

The Buddhist understanding of this experience calls it ‘awakening’ and characterises it as a profound knowledge of the origin and causes of suffering and an awareness of the way to live to bring about release from the perpetual cycle of birth and rebirth. ‘Buddha’ is a title that means ‘the enlightened one’, and Gautama also became known as Sakya-Muni, ‘the sage of the Sakyas’. He called his philosophy the Middle Way because it advocated moderation rather than extreme asceticism or excessive luxury. After his enlightenment the Buddha gathered a group of disciples around him and taught them about the way to practise compassion as a means of progressing towards spiritual release. He travelled all over India teaching his philosophy and by the time of his death at the age of eighty he had established a mendicant community which attracted considerable support. This monastic community is known as the ‘sangha’. The teachings of the Buddha were only written down in about the first century CE. Before this date Buddhist Councils were held to preserve and codify the Buddha’s teachings orally.⁵⁶

The central teachings of Buddhism to which all the different traditions subscribe are found in pronouncements which are traditionally called ‘the four noble truths’. The first truth concerns the fact of suffering, or dukkha in Pali. The concept of dukkha covers not only suffering but everything that is unsatisfactory in life. This includes the basic biological facts of sickness, ageing, and death, the physical and mental pain that inevitably accompanies human existence, and the general frustration involved in being unable to attain what we desire, or only being able to hold on to what we want for a short time because of the fragile and transitory nature of life. The world is unstable and unreliable: pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering are intimately bound up with one another. It is this state of affairs that we must recognise if we are ever to be free of suffering.

⁵⁶ The first Buddhist writings are in fact not in the form of texts but are found carved on stone pillars erected by King Ashoka (ruled c. 272–231 BCE) to promote Buddhist teachings. Ashoka was the foremost missionary of early Buddhism and the first known ruler in the world to embrace non-violence and eschew war as an instrument of policy. See Charles Allen, *Ashoka: The Search for India’s Lost Emperor* (London: Little, Brown, 2012).

Many Victorian writers interpreted the first noble truth as bleak and pessimistic. They contrasted it with the promise of hope in a future state of happiness that Christianity seemed to offer. Modern writers on Buddhism, however, see the first noble truth as a statement of the reality of life as it is rather than a counsel of despair. No one can doubt the fact of change or the inevitability of suffering and death.

The second noble truth follows on from the first and concerns the origin of suffering, which can be characterised generally as due to craving, or, in other words, due to desires and drives that are constantly seeking gratification. This craving may be for sensual pleasures or more generally for abstract notions such as fame or immortality. Even the desire to survive death and the desire to escape this life through suicide are counted as cravings. Such cravings lead to attachments, which are of various different kinds: to pleasure, to one's own views, to the doctrine that there is a permanent self. We can even – mistakenly – become attached to the Buddha's teaching itself. Many undesirable psychological states arise from unsatisfied cravings and unfulfilled attachment, such as anger, depression, hatred, violence and general confusion of mind. Happiness can only come from the letting go of all desires and attachments. Such cessation of craving and consequent cessation of suffering is the goal of the Buddhist path and is known as Nirvana, or awakening.

The third noble truth, then, is that suffering can be overcome by extinguishing desires and becoming 'awakened'. Nirvana can be attained in this life; in that case the individual continues to speak and act in the world, free of all feelings of greed and motivated instead entirely by generosity, friendliness, and wisdom. At death such an individual is freed from the cycle of rebirth, the ultimate Buddhist goal. Such was the experience of the historical Buddha who achieved Nirvana and then spent the next forty years teaching and preaching before his death. Nirvana cannot be characterised as either existence or non-existence because it is beyond the reach of these concepts. Fundamentally, it is a state that cannot be defined or

analysed, but only experienced.⁵⁷

The fourth noble truth is concerned with Buddhist practice and developing those qualities which will ultimately lead to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of Nirvana. This is known as ‘the noble eightfold path’ and summed up as right, or appropriate, view, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. Right view and intention involves seeing the four noble truths and acting with compassion, not out of desire; right speech and right action concerns speaking with love, refraining from harming living beings and from theft and sexual misconduct; right livelihood means that we must live according to the Buddhist way; right effort, mindfulness, and concentration refer to the practice of Buddhist meditation. Following the noble eightfold path is not a matter simply of following ethical rules, but entails an inner transformation of one’s whole being. The practice of meditation, of calming the mind to achieve insight, is of great importance in achieving such a transformation.

The nature and quality of the individual’s life is important in Buddhist thought because all actions have consequences and determine the form of the rebirth into a higher or lower state, whether as a human being or as an animal. The movement of beings between rebirths is governed by the law of karma, the relation of actions and consequences, seen as a natural law inherent in the nature of things much like a law of physics rather than as a system of reward and punishment meted out by a deity. However the law of karma should not be understood as a rigid and mechanical one but as a flexible and dynamic working out of the fruits of action, not fully understandable in its operation to anyone but an enlightened Buddha. This operation of cause and effect which leads to rebirth is sometimes known as ‘dependent arising’ and in the Tibetan tradition is represented pictorially as a ‘wheel of existence’. The representation of the wheel was known to Victorian writers and is found in particular in L. Austine Waddell’s *The Religion of Tibet, or Lamaism* (1895), a book that, as I argue in Chapter 4, Kipling knew and used in *Kim*.

⁵⁷ Nineteenth-century writers found Nirvana the most baffling of all Buddhist concepts. See Guy Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: the Philosophers and the Buddha*, tr. by David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

All the figures on the wheel shown in the picture are symbolic of psychological and physical states that lead to the different realms of rebirth. The wheel itself is clutched in the hands and jaws of Yama, the god of death. The whole wheel illustrates the concept of samsara, the cycle of rebirth from which Buddhists seek to free themselves. Particularly important for the structure of *Kim* is the fact that the wheel is driven by three animals at its hub: a cock, representing greed, a snake, representing anger or hatred, and a pig, representing ignorance. Kipling uses this trio in the novel in presenting the lama's attempts to free himself from greed, anger, and ignorance, as he embarks on the path to enlightenment and explores his role as a bodhisattva.

It is important to emphasise that Buddhists do not believe that there is a permanent self that endures between lifetimes. The words 'myself' and 'yourself' can be used in general parlance to refer to a collection of mental and physical states experienced by the individual, but do not entail that there is a permanent, metaphysical self that survives death. The self does not endure between rebirths; there is a causal connection between the phenomena that constitute an individual at death and the phenomena that constitute a being at the start of a new life but this causal connection is not the same as the continuity of the individual. This doctrine of 'not-self', atman, was one of the aspects of Buddhist thought that that Victorian writers found most difficult to grasp or accept, since it seemed so different from the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul. One of the features of Buddhism that led to its being characterised in the nineteenth century as pessimistic or nihilistic was precisely the doctrine of atman.

The Buddhist way is expressed through the word 'Dharma', which means both the underlying reality of things and the way in which the individual should act. It was usually translated in the nineteenth century as 'law', which assigns a prescriptive force to the concept and does not encompass its whole meaning. Knowledge of Dharma comes through listening, reflection, and spiritual practice, not through intellectual study. It is important to learn the Buddhist Dharma through a teacher, and transmission of the Buddhist tradition for centuries came through an unbroken line from the Buddha himself to his disciples and after that through the monks and nuns of the Buddhist community, or sangha. The ordinary lay Buddhist's access to Buddhist teachings was through the sangha, listening to the exposition of a

monk or nun. This oral transmission was the only form of access to Buddhist teachings for several centuries after the Buddha's death. Subsequently the oral tradition was codified in textual form, but the study of the texts was very much secondary to the teachings of the monks and nuns.

The formula for self-identifying as a Buddhist centres around the recognition of the importance of the historical Buddha, of the Dharma, and of the sangha, the community that the Buddha created in his lifetime. These are known as the 'three jewels', spiritual treasures of supreme worth. The formula for identifying oneself as a Buddhist is: 'I go to the Buddha as refuge; I go to the Dharma as refuge; I go to the sangha as refuge'. This formula is repeated three times to mark a difference from ordinary speech. The word 'refuge' is not used to suggest a place to escape but to bring to mind a joyful haven of calm in the midst of the changes and sufferings of life. In addition, a lay person who wishes to follow the Buddhist way will often take on five precepts: to do no harm, not to steal, not to indulge in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to take alcohol or mind-altering drugs. The only Westerners to have publicly identified themselves as Buddhists in the nineteenth century, Madame Helena Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, the founders of theosophy, did so by taking the five precepts in Ceylon in 1880.⁵⁸

The underlying motivation for the practice of the five precepts and the Buddhist way in general is the benefit and welfare of oneself and others. The healthy mind always contains the seeds of metta, loving-kindness, the wish for all beings to be well and happy, and it is an important part of the self-understanding of a Bodhisattva. Interestingly, the concept of metta has been identified as the key concept of *Kim* by the noted Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi, who is a practising Buddhist.⁵⁹

The Buddhist understanding of the world is not based around the idea of a creator God who punishes or rewards our actions. Buddhism postulates no ultimate beginning to the world; individuals have undergone countless millions of previous lives, as indeed did the historical Buddha himself. This raises a question which

⁵⁸ Olcott's own account of this ceremony is to be found in Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: the Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society*, 6 vols (Adyar: the Theosophical Publishing House, 1954), II, pp. 167–68.

⁵⁹ Aung San Suu Kyi, 'On the Shelf', *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1996, p. 7.

troubled some nineteenth-century writers: can a system of belief which does not believe in a creator God be counted a religion at all? The definition of religion is of course a problematic one. To put the matter simply, if religion is defined as adopting a particular set of beliefs including a belief in a creator God, then Buddhism cannot be defined as a religion. On the other hand, if religion is understood as the practice of devotional activities and rituals then Buddhism must clearly be counted a religion. Buddhism itself is not concerned with this question, and in fact in the early texts there are no words for either 'Buddhism' or 'religion'. Rupert Gethin states the aims of Buddhism and its relation to belief clearly and helpfully:

Buddhism regards itself as presenting a system of training in conduct, meditation, and understanding that constitutes a path leading to the cessation of suffering. Everything is to be subordinated to this goal. And in this connection the Buddha's teachings suggest that preoccupation with certain beliefs and ideas about the ultimate nature of the world and our destiny in fact hinders our progress along the path rather than helping it. If we insist on working out exactly what to believe about the world and human destiny before beginning to follow the path of practice we will never even set out.⁶⁰

Buddhism, then, is best understood as a path or a way rather than as a creedal religion in which assent to certain propositions is an important part of faith.

This short summary of the main ideas and practices of Buddhism as presented by modern scholars today forms a background to Victorian constructions of the religion. As I have said, Philip C. Almond makes the important point that nineteenth-century writers very much constructed Buddhism from its texts, rather than from observing Buddhism in practice. In fact, Buddhist practice was often described in unfavourable terms when it was felt to deviate from the earliest texts. Thus the discussion of Buddhism that is to be found in nineteenth-century books and periodicals centres largely on the history of the religion and its major concepts. Apart from scholars such as Thomas William Rhys Davids and Max Müller, the religious stance of the writers generally determined their view of Buddhism, with missionary authors being particularly hostile. J. Jeffrey Franklin analyses Victorian constructions of the religion as being divided into 'good' Buddhism or 'bad'

⁶⁰ Gethin, *Foundations*, pp. 65–66.

Buddhism.⁶¹ ‘Good’ Buddhism, Franklin argues, consisted of those elements of Buddhism which were most compatible with dominant religious and social ideologies, namely the ‘Jesus-like saintliness of its founder, its ethical system (the Precepts, the Eightfold Path), and certain perceived parallels to the history of Protestantism’. This last point refers to the fact that many English writers identified Theravada Buddhism, perceived as earlier and ‘purer’, with Protestantism, and Mahayana Buddhism, with its reliance on priests and rituals, with Roman Catholicism. ‘Bad’ Buddhism characterised those teachings of the religion that were most antithetical to Christianity, namely those pertaining to nirvana, the universality of suffering, the fact of continuous change, the non-existence of the permanent self and the lack of a creator (21–22). As Franklin says, these last beliefs were problematic for many Victorians because they posed a threat to the core ideologies and beliefs dominant in the nineteenth century: belief in God, the eternal soul, individualism and progress (24).

In the nineteenth century there were hardly any Western practitioners of the religion, in spite of the interest generated by books about the Buddha and Buddhism such as *The Light of Asia*, which is estimated to have sold over half a million copies. As I have indicated, the Westerners who were most conspicuous in proclaiming their allegiance to Buddhism were the theosophists Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, who took Buddhist vows in Galle, Ceylon, in 1880. However, Blavatsky and Olcott cannot be counted as Buddhist ‘converts’: they had a pronounced agenda, which was to subsume Buddhism into their own form of syncretic religion, and the organisation that they set up in Ceylon was known as the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Their attempt to adapt Buddhist beliefs into an all-encompassing schema of all faiths is discussed further in Chapter 2. (However it must be stressed that their public avowal of the five precepts was enthusiastically greeted by the Singhalese Buddhists, who were demoralised by the efforts of Western missionaries to stamp out Buddhism on the island.) Research done on Buddhism in Ireland has revealed that one person self-identified as Buddhist in Dublin according to the census of

⁶¹ J. Jeffrey Franklin, ‘The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism in Victorian England, 1870–1900’, *Victorian Review*, 37 (2011), 21–26. Further references are given in the text.

1871, but nothing is known about this person.⁶² There were probably seamen in South Asia who joined Buddhist monasteries attracted by the way of life of the monks, and recent research has established that Lawrence O'Rourke, an Irish working-class freethinker, was almost certainly the first Westerner to be ordained as a Buddhist monk or bhikkhu, probably in the early 1890s.⁶³ It was not until the twentieth century, however, that a Buddhist Society was established in London, and interest in Buddhist beliefs and practices grew from that time on. In contrast to Victorian times, many Westerners today self-identify as Buddhists. In the 2011 census 0.4% of the population of England and Wales, 247,743 people, gave their religious allegiance as Buddhist.⁶⁴

A key moment in the transmission of Buddhist ideas came with the opening of the first Buddhist bookshop in London in Bloomsbury in 1907. It was set up by Dr E. R. Rost, a member of the Indian Medical Service, Colonel J. R. Pain, an ex-soldier from Burma, and R. J. Jackson, who had come to Buddhism after reading Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and attending a lecture in Cambridge. Lectures were given in the back of the shop and the three self-confessed Buddhists spoke in the parks from a portable platform painted bright orange and bearing the slogan 'The word of the Glorious Buddha is Sure and Everlasting'. The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was formed on 3 November 1907.⁶⁵ In part this was to prepare for the first Buddhist mission to England of the Englishman Allan Bennett, who had been ordained a Buddhist monk in the Theravada tradition in Ceylon in 1902.⁶⁶ He took the name Ananda Maitreya (later Metteya). The first President of the Buddhist Society was the noted scholar Rhys Davids and the Society had some initial success: by 1909 it claimed five hundred members and had held fifty meetings. Ananda Metteya did indeed visit England in 1908 but because of poor

⁶² Laurence Cox and Maria Griffin, 'Border Country Dharma: Buddhism, Ireland and Peripherality', *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 10 (2009), 93–125 (p. 97).

⁶³ Laurence Cox, 'U Dhammaloka: Working-Class Irish Freethinker, and the First European Bhikkhu?' *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 10 (2009), 135–44.

⁶⁴ <<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011>> [accessed 19 February 2015]

⁶⁵ The bookshop in Bury Place is now the site of the London Review Bookshop.

⁶⁶ Recent research has in fact established that there was a previous Buddhist Mission to London from 1889–1892 headed by the Irish-born Japanese Buddhist Charles J.W. Pfoundes (1840–1907), who founded the 'Buddhist Propagation Society'. The Society did not continue after 1892. See Brian Bocking, Laurence Cox and Shin'ichi Yoshinaga, 'The First Buddhist Mission to the West: Charles Pfoundes and the London Buddhist Mission of 1889–1892', *Diskus*, 16 (2014), 1–33.

health, poor speaking skills and the limitations imposed on him as a monk, did not make much headway.⁶⁷ His hopes of returning to England within three years to establish a permanent Buddhist community in the West were unfulfilled because of his failing health. Nevertheless the founding of the Society was a key factor in the promulgation of Buddhist ideas and practice in Britain and it published some important articles in its journal *The Buddhist Review*. The early members of the Buddhist Society can be categorised as scholars of Buddhism, ex-colonials who had come across the religion in Asian countries, theosophists and those drawn to esoteric religion, and those converted by reading.

Kipling, however, is not recorded as showing any interest in the Buddhist Society and after the publication of *Kim* did not write about Buddhism again. I am not arguing that Kipling wished to ‘become’ a Buddhist, in the modern sense. This thesis is concerned not with Kipling’s own religious beliefs – which are difficult to determine – but with his imaginative construction of Buddhism in *Kim* and its context within the Victorian discovery of the religion. This rereading of *Kim* has provided for me ‘the excitement of opening or developing a line of thought’, which, in Patricia Meyer Spacks’s view, is one of the great benefits of rereading a work of fiction in a professional and critical way.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The material in this paragraph is based on L. S. Cousins, ‘Theravada Buddhism in England’ in *Buddhism into the Year 2000: International Conference Proceedings* (Bangkok: Dhammakaya Foundation, 1994), pp. 141–49 and Christmas Humphreys, *Sixty Years of Buddhism in England* (London: The Buddhist Society, 1968), pp. 2–5.

⁶⁸ Spacks, *On Rereading*, p. 165.

Chapter 1

Kipling and Arnold: Two Interpreters of Buddhism

The main way in which ideas about Buddhism entered the mainstream of Victorian culture was through a poem written by Sir Edwin Arnold (1832–1904), *The Light of Asia* (1879). Arnold's work portrays the life of the Buddha and Buddhist ideas in a highly sympathetic light and was an immediate success, selling more than half a million copies and achieving world-wide sales.¹ Amongst its many readers was the schoolboy Rudyard Kipling. One reason for the popularity of Arnold's poem was the fact that he changed and adapted his sources to present the alien figure of the Buddha as Christianised and therefore familiar, in the process utilising a kind of writing that was popular in Victorian times, that of the 'life' of Jesus. Although Kipling also presents Buddhism sympathetically in *Kim*, it is not aligned with Christianity but rather figures as an antithesis of the kind of evangelical Protestantism that he had experienced in his childhood. This contrast is also expressed in his poem 'The Buddha at Kamakura' (1892), in which the two religions are opposed: Buddhism is peaceful and tolerant, whereas Christianity is associated with 'beef-fed zealots' who are interested only in 'strife and trade'.²

The argument that I build through this chapter focuses on how Kipling developed novelistic character, setting, and narrative in a manner that shifts and subverts Arnold's popular presentation of Buddhism. The lama is not a Christ-like figure and *Kim* owes nothing to the traditional 'life' of Jesus. By using Buddhist

¹ The poem has not been much studied. Christopher Clausen suggests that the poem's stress on evolution, the likenesses between the Buddha and Christ and its exotic settings account for its appeal to the reading public, in his article 'Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and its Reception', *Literature East and West*, 17 (1973), 174–91. In another article, Clausen links the poem to the developing interest in world religions: 'Victorian Buddhism and the Origins of Comparative Religion', *Religion*, 5 (1975), 1–15. J. Jeffrey Franklin, in *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), contrasts it with Richard Phillips's pious and dull poem *The Story of Gautama Buddha and His Creed: an Epic* (London: Longmans, Green, 1871) to account for its appeal. Less persuasively, Herbert F. Tucker in *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790–1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Colin Graham in *Ideologies of Epic: Nation, Empire and Victorian Epic Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) have sought to place Arnold within the tradition of Victorian epic. Sebastian Lecourt, in a recent article, has examined the reception of Arnold's poem in colonial Ceylon: 'Idylls of the Buddh': Buddhist Modernism and Victorian Poetics in Colonial Ceylon', *PMLA*, 131 (2016), 668–85.

² Rudyard Kipling, *The Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 2010), p. 76.

ideas such as Nirvana, the doctrine of no-self, the wheel of life and the bodhisattva and imagining their impact on the spiritual life of a devout man, Kipling goes beyond the Westernising popularism represented by Arnold's poem, in a fiction that confirms his own cultural self-presentation. In politics, Kipling was always ready to present himself as the person with insider knowledge, one of the 'native-born' who truly understood India, unlike the politicians and commentators of the day. Similarly, and thanks in part to his father's curatorship of the Lahore Museum, Kipling saw himself as truly knowledgeable about Buddhism, especially as a religion with little in common with evangelical forms of Christianity. In this chapter I examine these differences between the presentation of Buddhism in *The Light of Asia* and *Kim* and show that Kipling's formative childhood experience of Christianity as cruel and heartless is crucial in his shaping of the Buddhist lama in *Kim* as kindly and compassionate.

Arnold and Kipling are part of a cultural movement in which interest in world religions in general and Buddhism in particular grew as the nineteenth century progressed. Archaeological discoveries and translation of early Buddhist texts brought knowledge about the religion into the mainstream of Victorian culture, and the development of the 'science of religion' as a study of religious practices and belief systems from historical and anthropological perspectives focused attention on the origins, traditions, and history of Buddhism.³ 'Knowledge' of Buddhism was very much constructed in terms of current discussions of the nature of creation, of the historicity of the Bible in the light of geological discoveries, of theism and atheism, and of annihilation and immortality.⁴ Many writers were fascinated by the affinities between Buddhism and Christianity, particularly the similarities between the birth stories of the Buddha and Christ and the likenesses of their ethical systems. Others described Buddhism as a modern and enlightened system which did not claim to be a religion and had no creator God, but whose ideas were fully in harmony with modern scientific ideas about evolution.⁵ As Christopher Clausen writes:

³ See Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

⁴ For details see Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁵ For a trenchant discussion of the Victorian construction of Buddhism as scientific see Donald S. Lopez, Jr, *The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life* (New Haven: Yale

The advantage of Buddhism for the agnostic who wished to retain a personal figure as the focus of religiosity was that one could accept the Buddha without believing in any of the supernatural doctrines on which theistic religion was based [...] It was as a superstition-free moral ideal that the Buddha and his religion had their most important impact, and that fact — threatening the formerly unique prestige of Christianity — was enough to make what would otherwise have been mere scholarly controversies take on general interest and importance.⁶

Arnold's presentation of Buddhism gives popular form to this view of the merits of Buddhism, since he lays stress on the attractiveness of Prince Gautama as a moral exemplar and emphasises not only his ethical teaching but the way in which consequences of good and bad actions can be understood in terms of evolution. The supernatural and miraculous elements of the traditional Buddhist texts are almost entirely absent from his poem, and the Prince is recognisably human and not divine. Clausen's contention that Arnold's construction of Buddhism was made to fit modern sensibilities is a sound one.

A further reason for the success of *The Light of Asia*, however, and one which Clausen does not discuss, was its genre, and this generic familiarity aided the poem's appeal. The literary 'life' of Jesus was immensely popular in the Victorian period, and the most famous examples participated in and helped form the theological controversies that raged during the century. Arnold explicitly conceived the poem in response to his friend Dean Farrar's *Life of Christ*, published in 1874, while Farrar's work in turn is a conservative response to two of the most famous 'lives' of Jesus published in the nineteenth century, D. F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu Kritisch Bearbeitet*, first published in Germany in 1835, and Ernest Renan's *La Vie de Jésus*, first published in France in 1863. Arnold deliberately placed *The Light of Asia* in this tradition not only in terms of content but also in his choice of stylistic features. In particular, in presenting the historical Buddha, he used the novelistic techniques of scene-painting and representing inner psychological struggles that Renan and Farrar had employed when writing about Christ. In the process Arnold helped to consolidate the Western understanding of Buddhism as a religion which, though it emerged five centuries before Christ, was founded by a charismatic individual in the

University Press, 2012); Donald S. Lopez, Jr, *Buddhism and Science: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁶ Clausen, 'Victorian Buddhism', p. 13.

same way that Jesus had, in some sense at least, founded Christianity.⁷ In a context where there was little tradition of writing about the life of the Buddha in fictional form, Arnold's work was an act of 'literary opportunism', to use Colin Graham's phrase, which capitalised on the growing interest in Buddhism in the later Victorian period and utilised a popular and successful genre to do so.⁸

The Light of Asia: a global best-seller

Edwin Arnold began his career as an Indian civil servant.⁹ He worked in India between 1857 and 1860 as headmaster of the Deccan Sanskrit College in Poona and there he taught himself Sanskrit and Marathi and discovered the Hindu devotional classics, some of which he translated after his return to England in 1860. He is thus an important figure in the mediation of devotional Hindu texts to the Victorian public, as Catherine Robinson argues.¹⁰ Arnold had a certain success with his translations of Hindu classics but none of these was as popular as *The Light of Asia*. By contrast with his earlier works, Arnold based this poem entirely on secondary sources and not on his own translations. He did not have any contact with Buddhism as a living faith in India and, although he knew Sanskrit, he does not appear to have

⁷ For the Buddhist traditions of Asia, on the other hand, it was the historical Buddha's identity with all previous Buddhas that was the key to his significance, and the supposed biographical facts about him were of little importance.

⁸ Graham, *Ideologies*, p. 129. Phillips's poem *The Story of Gautama Buddha* (1871) received little, if any, public attention. The only novel I have been able to find that treats of the life of the historical Buddha with approval before Arnold is a curious work published in 1876 entitled *Through the Ages: A Psychological Romance* by the Duke de Medina Pomar (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876). The theme of the novel is the transmigration of souls, and the protagonist describes one of his previous existences during the time of the historical Buddha. However the actual material dealing with Buddhism is presented as fact rather than fiction; a great deal of information about the life of Prince Gautama is provided, complete with scholarly footnotes. The novel's mixture of the genres of spiritual biography, time-travel fiction and factual information makes for a curiously hybrid work, and it was not a popular success. The Jewish scholar M. M. Kalisch (1828–1885) presents a highly sympathetic account of Buddhism through the voice of a practising Buddhist in his book *Path and Goal: a Discussion of the Elements of Civilisation and the Elements of Human Happiness* (London: Longmans, Green, 1880). This work, unique in Victorian literature as far as I am aware, consists of a dialogue between proponents of the major world religions.

⁹ The biographical information about Arnold in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, comes from Brooks Wright, *Interpreter of Buddhism to the West: Sir Edwin Arnold* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957). Wright knew Julian Arnold, Arnold's son, and used the notes that Julian Arnold had compiled in order to write his father's life, a project that he did not complete. The only other biography of Arnold, William Peiris, *Edwin Arnold: His Services to Buddhism* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970) relies heavily on Brooks Wright.

¹⁰ Catherine Robinson, "O Our India!" Towards a Reassessment of Sir Edwin Arnold', *Religions of South Asia*, 3 (2009), 203–19.

read any Buddhist texts in the language. Arnold simply did not have the time to go back to any original sources. The poem was composed while he was editing the *Daily Telegraph*: some of it was written as he travelled to work on the newly opened District Line.¹¹ Nevertheless in spite of its hasty composition and reliance on secondary sources the poem was an instant success. It sold over half a million copies, was translated into numerous languages, including Bengali and Sanskrit, and was widely read in Buddhist countries as well as in Europe and America.¹² In December 1879 the King of Siam acknowledged Arnold's services to Buddhism by appointing him an officer of the White Elephant and in 1885 Arnold was received with rapture in Ceylon, where the monks turned out in force to honour him and hear him speak, treating him as an ally in their struggle against missionary attempts to wipe out Buddhism on the island. In England the poem was read by figures as diverse as the future Queen Mary, who deemed it one of her 'favourite books', Lord Kitchener, who took it everywhere with him on his campaigns, and Mohindas Gandhi, who read it during his stay in London during 1888–91 and later wrote: 'I devoured it from cover to cover and was entranced by it'.¹³ In America it was widely admired, especially by the Transcendentalists. Oliver Wendell Holmes even compared it to the New Testament. T. S. Eliot read it 'with gusto' and 'more than once'.¹⁴ It is still listed as a good introduction to Buddhism on Buddhist websites, and Arnold's portrait hangs today in the headquarters of the Buddhist Society, London.¹⁵

One indication of the popularity of the work was the facility with which it was transmuted into other media. At least six operas based on the poem were produced, the most famous being *La Luce dell'Asia* by Isidore de Lara which was

¹¹ Edwin L. Arnold, 'Memoir' in *The Arnold Poetry Reader: Selections from the Poems of Sir Edwin Arnold* (London: Kegan Paul, [1920]), p. 10; Julian B. Arnold, *Giants in Dressing Gowns* (London: Macdonald, 1945), p. 175.

¹² Publishers' notice in the illustrated edition of 1889, p. vii.

¹³ *The Graphic*, 10 July 1893 <<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>> [accessed 10 December 2012]; *The Leeds Mercury*, 14 June 1899 <<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn>> [accessed 10 December 2012]; M. K. Gandhi, *The Message of the Gita*, compiled by R. K. Pradhu (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958), p.12, cited by Stephen Hay, 'The Making of a Late-Victorian Hindu: M. K. Gandhi in London, 1888–1891', *Victorian Studies*, 33 (1989), 74–98 (p. 85).

¹⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'What is Minor Poetry?' *The Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946), 1–18 (p. 5). Indeed, it has been plausibly argued that Arnold's poem was a key influence on the writing of *The Waste Land*. See James Whitlark, 'More Borrowings by T. S. Eliot from *The Light of Asia*', *Notes and Queries*, NS22 (1975), 206–07.

¹⁵ See, for instance, <http://www.buddhanet.net/cbooks_g.htm> [accessed 18 May 2016]

performed at Covent Garden in 1892. The poem was dramatized and later filmed in 1925, the first film to be made by a European director on Indian soil. Arnold gained world-wide fame and a knighthood (but not the laureateship he had hoped for on the death of Tennyson).¹⁶ It spawned two book-length poetic imitations, *Sakya-Muni: the Story of Buddha*, a Newdigate Prize poem by Sidney Arthur Alexander (1887), and *The Dawn and the Day* (1894) by Henry T. Miles, an American horse-breeder, whose poem was plagiarized outright from Arnold, undoubtedly an indication of Arnold's cultural reach and popularity.

The Light of Asia also had a major impact on religious practice. It is credited with inspiring the first known English convert to Buddhism, Charles Allan Bennett (1872–1923). Bennett read *The Light of Asia* in 1890 and ‘found that a new world of spiritual adventure was opened before his eyes’.¹⁷ He then went to Ceylon and took monastic vows in the Theravadan or Southern Buddhist tradition, returning to England in 1908 to head the first Buddhist mission to London. Frederic Fletcher (1877–1951), the first Westerner to receive ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in 1924, was also inspired by reading the poem to visit Ceylon in the 1890s.¹⁸ The poem was indisputably influential in inspiring Western Buddhist practice.

Arnold's poem is narrated by ‘an Indian Buddhist’ who proceeds to tell the main events in the life of Prince Gautama: in summary, his birth into wealth, the wooing of his bride, his father's attempts to keep him from the knowledge of suffering and death, his encounter with old age, illness, and death, his rejection of asceticism and finding of the ‘middle way’, his enlightenment, his teaching about the four noble truths and the noble eight-fold path, and his final instructions to his monks to form a sangha or community.¹⁹

What, then, was so appealing to the Victorian reading public? It was the

¹⁶ Queen Victoria supported his claim, but it was blocked by Gladstone because of Arnold's pro-Disraeli sympathies.

¹⁷ Christmas Humphreys, *Sixty Years of Buddhism in England* (London: the Buddhist Society, 1968), p. 2.

¹⁸ Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: the Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (London: Aquarian, 1994), p. 41.

¹⁹ Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia or the Great Renunciation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1903). References are given in the text.

subject matter that attracted readers, since it cannot be claimed that the poem has great literary merit. In an age in which doubts about Christian doctrine were frequently voiced, Buddhism appeared to be an appealingly sympathetic religion, in its perceived agnosticism, its empiricism, the attractiveness of its founder and its rejection of ritual, as Christopher Clausen suggests.²⁰ Many of the themes in the poem chime with Victorian concerns, giving it contemporary resonance. In particular, Arnold presents evolution as a philosophy that moulds the Buddha's thinking. Prince Gautama (the historical Buddha) is introduced to suffering as an adult and for the first time sees the cruelty in the natural world, described with familiar Tennysonian rhetoric. Gautama notes

How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,
And kite on both [...] till everywhere
Each slew a slayer and in turn was slain
Life living upon death. (13–14)

This is the familiar motif popularised by Tennyson as 'nature red in tooth and claw'.²¹ However Arnold does not leave it there but presents a solution to the intractable theological problem of suffering by reference to a notion of spiritual evolution achieved through ethical action. Through a series of rebirths the individual will be able to reach Nirvana, the end of suffering, and the natural world will thereby be transformed. The Buddha teaches a way of virtue to achieve Nirvana, but is not a divine figure. He is always recognisably human, particularly so when he agonises about whether to leave his wife and child and become a mendicant. The miraculous events associated with the Buddha's birth are downplayed, and the Buddha refuses to perform miracles. Thus the most contentious problems for Christian faith for many Victorians — the nature of the creator, the problem of evil, the divinity of Jesus, and the historicity of the miracles in the gospels — are avoided. Arnold presents the Buddha as a Christ-like figure who teaches a simple code of morality and in doing so defuses perplexing theological complexities, as my next section will explore.

The Light of Asia: a Christ-like Buddha

Arnold may have learnt about Buddhism from his relative Thomas Wentworth

²⁰ Clausen, 'Victorian Buddhism', 1–15.

²¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. by Erik Gray, 2nd edn (London: Norton, 2004), p. 41.

Higginson (1823–1911), the American abolitionist, who in 1874 gave a talk at the South Place Chapel, one of the ‘Ethical Societies’ of the later Victorian period. We have information about this talk from a series of articles in the *Daily Telegraph*, which Arnold was then editing, in which the Rev. Charles Maurice Davies visited different religious groups in London.²² Higginson systematically linked Christianity and Buddhism: he read an extract from Buddhist writings and compared it to the Sermon on the Mount, called Christianity and Buddhism ‘the two greatest religions in the world’ and linked the Buddhist Emperor King Asoka and Constantine the Roman Emperor as two important rulers. He also gave an account of the Buddha’s life and the Wheel of the Law, telling the story of the disciple of the Buddha who asked for a drink of water from a low caste woman, overruling her objection that she was not fit to give it to him. This enabled him to use the familiar trope of contrasting the Hindu caste-system with the supposed classlessness of Buddhism, something that Arnold develops in his poem. Since Higginson was related by marriage to Arnold it is plausible that the two men met while the former was in London and indeed that Arnold went to the service to hear him speak.

More important, though, than Arnold’s acquaintance with Higginson for the writing of his poem was his use of textual sources. He makes it clear in the Preface to his poem that the work is based on his reading of books about Buddhism in English, paying ‘homage to the many eminent scholars who have devoted noble labours to his [Buddha’s] journey, for which both repose and ability are wanting to me’ (xi).²³ Arnold is not talking here about lack of poetic ability, for he always had a very high opinion of his own gifts, but about the fact that he relied wholly on translations and missionary writings. Two of the books that he used were scholarly works published in the 1870s: Samuel Beal’s *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (1875), a translation from the Chinese, and Max Müller’s translation of the *Dhammapada* (sayings of the Buddha), which was published together with a

²² Davies published his findings in several books. For Higginson’s talk see Charles Maurice Davies, *Unorthodox London: or, Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis*, 2nd edn (London: Tinsley, 1876). Davies’s other visits are recorded in *Heterodox London: or, Phases of Freethought in the Metropolis* (London: Tinsley, 1874); *Mystic London: or, Phases of Occult Life in the Metropolis* (London: Tinsley, 1875); *Orthodox London: or, Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis* (London: Tinsley, 1876).

²³ For Arnold’s use of his sources I have relied on Hesaraghatta Sastri, ‘Sir Edwin Arnold’s Indian Poetry: a Source Study and Analysis’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 1960).

translation of the Burmese version of the parables of Buddhagoshā, the fifth century Indian commentator and scholar, in 1870.²⁴ Arnold also relied on *A Manual of Buddhism* [sic] by the Wesleyan missionary Robert Spence Hardy, published in 1853.²⁵ All of these works were well known in Victorian times: Kipling mentions Samuel Beal in *Kim* and owned at least one work by Spence Hardy. The ethical sayings of the *Dhammapada* were known to Lockwood Kipling, and, according to Charles Allen, the teaching in this book was passed on by the elder Kipling to his son.²⁶ Thus Kipling and Arnold use similar sources in their imagining of Buddhism, but with very different results.

Arnold has a somewhat cavalier attitude to his sources. In his preface he characterises them in the following way:

Discordant in frequent particulars, and sorely overlaid by corruptions, inventions, and misconceptions, the Buddhistical books yet agree in the one point of recording nothing — no single act or word — which mars the perfect purity and tenderness of this Indian teacher, who united the truest princely qualities with the intellect of a sage and the passionate devotion of a martyr. (viii)

Arnold's assumption that the sources are 'corrupt' and 'contradictory' reflects the commonly held belief at the time that the earliest texts of Buddhism were purer and more authentic than the later ones. The first translations of Buddhist texts in the nineteenth century by Burnouf and his followers had been of the Sanskrit texts of the Mahayana (Northern) tradition, but as the century wore on scholars in England came to favour the more ancient Theravada (Southern) tradition as being more authentic and closer to what was perceived as 'original' Buddhism.²⁷ This belief echoes the almost universally held assumption in Protestant biblical studies in the nineteenth century that uncovering the earliest Christian sources and determining the first gospel to be written would reveal the pure, authentic teaching of the historical Jesus. Such criticism aimed by minute scrutiny of the gospel sources to explore questions such as the literary relation of the gospels, the historicity of the gospel events and the

²⁴ Samuel Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (London: Trubner, 1875). Further references are given in the text; Max Müller, *Buddha's Dhammapada*, in T. Rogers, *Buddhagoshā's Parables* (London: Trubner, 1870).

²⁵ R. Spence Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism* [sic] (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853).

²⁶ Charles Allen, *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Abacus, 2008), p. 358.

²⁷ Franklin, *Lotus*, p. 30.

original teaching of Jesus. The early texts were privileged over the later practices of the Church: thus studies of Buddhist texts took their methodology largely from the emerging interest in textual criticism of the gospels.

Against this background, it is not surprising that Arnold's poem presents the Buddha as a Christianised and therefore familiar figure. Arnold utilises the fact that there are similarities between the life and teaching of the Buddha and that of Jesus, similarities which were often commented upon. As Christopher Clausen remarks, 'virtually all the books on the subject, even by the missionaries hostile to Buddhism, drew attention to the parallels'.²⁸ Arnold exploits these parallels. There are biblical echoes throughout the poem, suggesting that Gautama is a Jesus figure. The Prince tells himself 'the hour has come' (61), he is the 'King of kings' (63), he casts away his world 'to save my world' (71), 'the kingdom' that he craves is 'more than many realms' (67) and he lays down his life 'for love of men' (64). These echoes of the gospel of John would have been audible and obvious to readers.²⁹ Furthermore, in language more reminiscent of the gospel of Luke, which stresses Jesus' compassion, the Buddha is presented as a figure of 'heavenly pity' who seeks the truth about human suffering. He will 'teach compassion unto men' (51). Constructing the alien as familiar, as Arnold does, is, I argue, one reason for the success of the poem. As opposed to a missionary writer like Spence Hardy, who presents Buddhism as threatening, Arnold uses a popular genre to present a Christ-like Buddha.

Arnold stresses the parallels between the human Jesus and the Buddha, but he makes the Buddha a more obviously sympathetic figure than the Jesus of the gospels. He 'did not hesitate to add material of his own invention which altered not only incidents in the life of Gautama but also his teachings'.³⁰ The most prominent example is the long passage dealing with the agonies of Prince Gautama when he has to decide whether to leave his wife and unborn child and go out into the world as a mendicant. Almost the whole of Book IV of the poem is taken up with these conflicts: the Prince looks one last time at his sleeping wife and is torn between his feelings of duty and love. He leaves three times, and three times returns, 'So strong her beauty was, so large his love' (65). According to the original sources, the Prince

²⁸ Clausen, 'Reception', p. 181.

²⁹ The parallels are to be found in John 10.11, 13.1, 12.47, 18.36, 15.13.

³⁰ Sastri, 'Arnold', p. 170.

was indeed married and had a child, but the conflict in his mind is Arnold's own invention, since the texts emphasise the Buddha's resolve. Sastri states the Buddhist point of view:

All this [the depiction of the conflict in the Buddha's mind] would be revolting to a Buddhist, who could never conceive of a Tathagata [the name the Buddhist used when referring to himself] growing sentimental and expressing such terrible infirmity of mind just before venturing on the noblest pursuit of Supreme Enlightenment.³¹

Arnold's aim in this passage, however, is not to depict a remote figure conscious of his own purpose but to present a human, domesticated, and family-loving Buddha who feels strongly the sacrifice of his relationship with wife and child to go out into the world. Arnold makes the Prince's decision to leave the palace into a very non-Buddhist struggle between love and duty. He presents a portrait of a man sacrificing family ties and affections that for readers is both familiar and domestic: more understandable and sympathetic, even, than the sacrifice of Christ.

A further invented passage comes in Book V where Prince Gautama cares for an ill lamb. He reassures the suffering mother and bids her be 'at peace', because he will 'bear her care' (80). As he picks up the lame lamb he reflects:

Alas! For all my sheep which have
No shepherd; wandering in the night with none
To guide them (84).

Arnold seems to have invented this incident because of the obvious parallels with Christ as the good shepherd. In this passage Gautama is also the good shepherd who feeds his sheep. However, he is the lamb of God who cares about, rather than takes away, the sins of the world.

The nature of the sacrifice of Christ, the lamb of God, has been debated within Christianity for centuries. Arnold makes another indirect intervention into this controversy by including in the poem a legend well-known to the Victorians in which the Buddha, in a previous existence, sacrificed himself to feed a starving tigress by laying aside his clothes and offering himself to her.³² The tigress 'had her

³¹ Sastri, 'Arnold', pp.115, 116.

³² This story is to be found in Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction to the Study of Indian Buddhism*, tr. by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez, Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago

feast of him' and the Buddha offers himself willingly as a sacrifice as a sign of his 'fearless love' (89). This offering echoes Christ's own, but unlike Christ it is so that one of the most feared predators of the animal kingdom can feed herself and her cubs, thus showing the Buddha's wide love for the whole of animal creation. By including the legend of the Buddha and the tiger, Arnold may appeal to readers who find an orthodox Christian theology of sacrifice as an act of expiation for men's sins difficult to accept but nevertheless wish to retain a notion of love for others. It is worth noting here that the usual Victorian attitude to the tiger was that it was rapacious and cruel, and therefore fair game to be shot.³³ Arnold presents the Buddha as a willing victim of this ferocious creature to underline to readers the Buddha's altruistic love for all creation, thus marking a clear distinction between the Buddha and Christ in respect of the nature of their sacrifice.

Amongst the most contentious topics of Christian (and anti-Christian) debate in the nineteenth century concerned the nature of the miracles that Christ performed, and in particular the status of the virgin birth and the resurrection. Arnold avoids such difficult issues by eliminating virtually all of the miracles in his sources, such as those said to have occurred at the birth and enlightenment of Prince Gautama. For instance, in Samuel Beal's *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha*, we read that at the birth of the Buddha, 'there was a supernatural light spread everywhere, and the earth quaked again' (40). At the Buddha's enlightenment, according to Beal's translation:

The heavens, the earth, and all the spaces between the encircling zones of rock, were lit up with a supernatural splendour; whilst flowers and every kind of precious perfume fell down in thick profusion [...] The earth shook six times [...] All kinds of garments, gold, silver, precious stones, and so on, also fell at the feet of Buddha. (224–25)

Arnold omits these passages as he does all references from his sources to cosmic miracles. He emphasises rather an incident in which Prince Gautama actually refuses to perform the miracle of raising a child from the dead, thus drawing an obvious

Press, 2010), pp. 185–86. It was well known in Victorian times, as can be seen from the fact that one of the characters in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) alludes to the story to introduce a discussion of Deronda's altruism. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 522.

³³ See Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 28, 266–67.

contrast between the Buddha and Jesus who did raise people from the dead, according to the gospel narratives. The episode is taken from the parables of Buddhagosha, the fifth century Buddhist commentator.³⁴ The prince is confronted by a woman whose child has died, who begs him to heal the dead boy. Gautama tells her to seek a black mustard-seed — a commonly found object — but she must not take it from the hand or house of anyone ‘where father, mother, child or slave has died’ (82). The mother is of course unable to do this. Gautama has given her a lesson in the inevitability of suffering, the first noble truth of Buddhism. Here we have a clear contrast with the gospel narrative of the raising of Jairus’s daughter, where a father begs Jesus to heal his dying daughter and Jesus raises her from the dead.³⁵ Unlike Jesus, the Buddha does not perform miracles. For any reader troubled by the historicity of the gospel miracles, the Buddha is a religious figure who may be easier to assimilate with the shifting contexts in which some aspects of Christianity were challenged.

Arnold thus presents the Buddha in a Christianised way, using language reminiscent of the gospels and alluding to debates about the nature of Jesus, his sacrifice and his ability to perform miracles. In these respects Arnold’s poem follows in the tradition of the radical reinterpretations of Jesus’ life that were influential in the nineteenth century, particularly *La Vie de Jésus* by Ernest Renan (1863). Indeed, Arnold uses some generic features of the literary lives of Jesus and this suggests another explanation of the poem’s immense popularity. I now examine some of the most prominent of these lives and show how Arnold’s poem can be read as fitting into and exploiting the popularity of the genre.

Rewriting the life of Jesus

‘Lives’ of Jesus were prolific in the Victorian period.³⁶ At first sight it may seem strange that there should be any need for a life of Jesus that is anything more than a

³⁴ Rogers, *Buddhagosha’s Parables*, pp. 100–01.

³⁵ Mark 5. 35–43.

³⁶ There were at least five thousand lives of Jesus written in Victorian times. For details see Samuel Gardiner Ayres, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: an English Bibliography of Christology Comprising over Five Thousand Titles Annotated and Classified* (New York: Armstrong, 1906). One striking rewriting of the life of Jesus was by Eliza Lynn Linton, who presented him as an early Communist: *The True History of Joshua Davidson, Christian and Communist* (London: Strahan, 1872).

devotional response to the gospels. After all, the gospels were probably written within a century of Jesus' death and there is no additional material for a biographer to call upon. However, the narratives in the gospels present obvious problems for the reader. The first three gospels give a broadly similar account of events in the life of Jesus, and for this reason they are called synoptic. The gospel of John, though, presents a very different narrative. In this gospel Jesus' ministry is in Judaea and Jerusalem from the beginning; the dramatic event of the cleansing of the Temple, which in the Synoptic Gospels takes place at the start of Holy Week, is placed right at the start of Jesus' ministry; the raising of Lazarus (which does not occur in the Synoptic Gospels) is the event which precipitates the Jewish authorities to take action against Jesus; Jesus does not teach in parables; there is no mention of his teaching on the Kingdom of God; the resurrection narratives are different; and there are no birth narratives.³⁷ Such apparent discrepancies between the gospels have always troubled those who see the Bible as a divinely inspired text.

Even within the Synoptic Gospels there is divergence. Some of Jesus' most famous parables, such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, only appear in the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Mark contains no birth or resurrection narratives. Conflicts between the gospels are obvious to any reader, as Olive Schreiner reflects in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) when Waldo, a sensitive but uneducated boy, puzzles about the discrepancies in the biblical narrative and the nature of truth:

*Why did the women in Mark see only one angel and the women in Luke two? Could a story be told in opposite ways and both ways be true? Could it? Could it? [Italics in the original]*³⁸

Schreiner voices here her own doubts about the truth of the gospel narratives, echoing the puzzlement that has been felt by many readers since the gospels were written. Historically such differences between the gospels have been one motivator for a particular kind of life of Jesus, one in which the gospel narratives were harmonised. As Daniel Pals shows in his excellent *The Victorian "Lives" of Jesus*

³⁷ For details of Victorian writings on the differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John see Michael Wheeler, *St John and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁸ Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 67.

(1982), this enterprise has a long history, the first harmony of the gospels being composed by Augustine c.400 CE.³⁹ Mediaeval writers were more interested in analogical interpretations, but harmonies emerged again in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as a consequence of the Reformation emphasis on the study of the text and ‘a renewed and serious technical study of the biblical documents’.⁴⁰ The gospels began to be arranged as parallel texts as well as combined into a single narrative. These kinds of harmonies continued to be compiled into the nineteenth century, and, as we shall see, Dean Farrar’s *The Life of Christ* (1874) is of this tradition.

Another kind of life of Jesus that appeared from earliest times was devotional, and attempts to retell the Christian story in a way that was fresh and dramatic. Many such lives were written in the Victorian period and Farrar’s *The Life of Christ* can certainly be read in this way. But from the seventeenth century onwards a new critical approach to the scriptures had emerged, at first in the writings of Spinoza and Hobbes, then in Deist writings of the eighteenth century and finally in German theological writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was such works in the ‘critical style’ which proved so controversial in Victorian England and which were instrumental in changing theological and religious discourse, precipitating the processes gathered under the heading of secularization. Such works also helped to prepare the way for an acceptance of the merits of other religions by questioning fundamental orthodoxies such as the evidential quality of miracles and the uniqueness of Jesus. The German theologian David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) published his highly controversial book, *Das Leben Jesu Kritisch Bearbeitet* (*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*), in Germany in 1835–36; it was brought into the English mainstream by means of George Eliot’s brilliant translation of the fourth edition in 1846.⁴¹ As Horton Harris rightly says, ‘No single theological work ever

³⁹ Daniel Pals, *The Victorian “Lives” of Jesus* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1982). There is also an excellent discussion of the genre by Jennifer Stevens in her book *The Historical Jesus and the Literary Imagination 1860–1929* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Pals, “Lives”, p. 8.

⁴¹ Eliot was introduced to the work by the Unitarian Charles Hennell who had himself written a work of biblical exegesis in which he rejected the historicity of the gospel miracles but professed an admiration for Christ and Christianity. Hennell was asked by the Radical politician Joseph Parkes, who knew of his work, to arrange for a translation of Strauss’s book. Hennell’s wife Rufa Brabant, whose father had met Strauss, embarked on the translation, but found herself unable to proceed very far and so requested that Eliot take it over. Eliot famously found aspects of the work tedious. She had criticisms of Strauss’s

created such consternation in the theological world as Strauss's *Life of Jesus*'.⁴² Indeed, Strauss's impact on Victorian thought and culture has been compared with that of Darwin, for example by A. M. Fairbairn, a Congregational theologian, who wrote in 1876, 'This century has been rich in books that create epochs, but no one was more directly destructive, more indirectly creative, than the *Leben Jesu*. The only one that can be compared with it in importance and revolutionary force is the "Origin of Species"'.⁴³

The work that created such a sensation is not a conventional life of Jesus as such but rather the setting forth of a new methodology with which to approach the gospel narratives. Strauss systematically reviewed all of the latter, rejecting in turn a rationalist and a supernaturalist interpretation of events, and concluding finally that most of the stories must be interpreted as myth, which he defined as 'expressions in storylike form of temporally conditioned religious ideas'.⁴⁴ Myth is not falsehood but 'an expression of the thoughts of all'.⁴⁵

The most controversial part of Strauss's book comes when he uses a similar methodology for the narratives of the resurrection. His conclusions about the differing resurrection accounts in the gospels are that 'nothing but wilful blindness can prevent the perception that no one of the narrators knew and presupposed what another records'.⁴⁶ In other words, there is no historical basis to the accounts of the resurrection. According to Strauss, the resurrection narratives derive from the belief of the disciples that the Messiah would suffer combined with a further belief that the Messiah had entered into his glory. Man, not God, is the originator of the biblical

unvarying methodology which means that he obscures the difference between various types of biblical narrative: 'in many cases I think him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has general truth'. See Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: a Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 52, 58; *George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1954–1978), I, p. 203. However in her 1851 article 'R.W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*', Eliot praises Strauss for introducing a truly philosophic spirit into the study of mythology.

⁴² Horton Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and his Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. ix.

⁴³ A.M. Fairbairn, 'David Friedrich Strauss: a Chapter in the History of Modern Religious Thought', *Contemporary Review*, 27 (1876), p. 951, quoted in Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004), p. 43.

⁴⁴ Peter C. Hodgson, 'Introduction', in David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, tr. by George Eliot, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson (London: S. C. M. Press, 1973), p. xxvi.

⁴⁵ Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot's Mythmaking* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), p. 37.

⁴⁶ Hodgson, Eliot, *Life of Jesus*, p. 727.

narratives.

Critical readers ignored the end of the work where Strauss turns away from an exegesis of the biblical narratives to a more positive interpretation of Christianity. The book was widely interpreted as an attack on Christianity, because of Strauss's insistence on the impossibility of miracles, his attack on the historicity of the resurrection and his rendering of Jesus as no more than a man. Because of these controversial views, Strauss lost his university post in Germany and was popularly portrayed as the anti-Christ.⁴⁷

Strauss's book came into the mainstream of English thought and culture through Eliot's translation and was widely used by religious sceptics. For example, Thomas Cooper (1805–92), the radical Chartist and freethinker who later reconverted and became a Baptist, made reference to it in his public lectures in his advocacy of unbelief, and also in his reconversion to Christianity.⁴⁸ Strauss raised key questions for Christian belief: was Jesus the son of God? Do the gospels have any historical basis? Did Jesus' miracles really happen? Was the resurrection a historical event that could be taken as a proof of Jesus' divinity? All his answers were in the negative. His work constituted the greatest challenge to orthodox faith in the nineteenth century, a challenge that Arnold responds to in presenting the Buddha as a man who was not divine and who performed no miracles.

Strauss's work paved the way for other radical reinterpretations of the life of Jesus, the most important of which was Ernest Renan's *La Vie de Jésus*, published in France in 1863 and in England the following year.⁴⁹ It is, as H. W. Wardman remarks, a life written from a 'humanist, liberal and romantic point of view'.⁵⁰ Renan writes in a very different way from Strauss's dull prose. Readers were charmed by Renan's fresh and vivid style and his ability to conjure up the sights and scenes of the Holy Land. He presents his work as a historical biography but one that has the

⁴⁷ The German writer Eschenmayer even presents Strauss as the winner of a contest in Hell to find the person in history who has done most damage to Christianity. The runner up is Judas Iscariot. See Harris, *Strauss*, p. 77.

⁴⁸ For details see Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 72–108.

⁴⁹ Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: Trubner, 1864). The work was translated into most European languages. References to the work are given in the text.

⁵⁰ H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: a Critical Biography* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), p. 81.

feel of novelistic scene-setting, with its descriptions of the land where Jesus lived and its evocation of his life and times. Renan's Jesus is a young working-class preacher who was much influenced by the beauty of his surroundings and who gathered a devoted band of disciples around him but was encouraged to think of himself as the expected Jewish Messiah only through the malign influence of John the Baptist. Jesus wanted people to think he could work miracles and attacked the institutions of Judaism because he wished to be seen as a reformer; the authorities responded by putting him to death. Renan does not deal with the controversial question of the resurrection in detail but clearly shows his view:

Had his body been taken away, or did enthusiasm, always credulous, create afterwards the group of narratives by which it was sought to establish faith in the resurrection? In the absence of opposing documents this can never be ascertained. Let us say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalen played an important part in this circumstance. Divine power of love! Sacred moments in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God! (296)

Renan thus rejects the traditional supernaturalist view of the resurrection, attributing the belief, by implication, to the strong desire of Mary Magdalen to see Jesus again. He has a similarly rationalistic approach to the miracles that Jesus himself performed:

Scientific medicine, founded by Greece five centuries before, was at the time of Jesus unknown to the Jews of Palestine. In such a state of knowledge, the presence of a superior man, treating the diseased with gentleness, and giving him by some sensible signs the assurance of his recovery, is often a decisive remedy. (191)

In other words, Jesus was able to heal by the power of his personality and not by any supernatural agency. In his interpretation of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, though, Renan has a different kind of view, that Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary might have colluded in faking the event to further the claims of Jesus as a reformer.⁵¹ Such an allegation of pious fraud on behalf of the disciples led to many attacks from early reviewers, and Renan came to be bracketed with Strauss as an apostle of disbelief.⁵² George Eliot herself was unimpressed with Renan's scholarship, calling the construction of Jesus' life by Renan 'dubious' and 'too

⁵¹ Renan, *Life*, p. 252.

⁵² For example, John Cairns, *False Christs and True, or the Gospel History Maintained in Answer to Strauss and Renan* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1864).

facile'.⁵³ These emphatic reservations made little impact on the work's many readers, however. It was a highly popular book, which 'passed swiftly through countless editions and new printings, earned its author celebrity status, and became beyond its age a literary classic'.⁵⁴ It is not hard to see the attraction. Renan's book reads like a novel, he uses some of the techniques of historical romance by evoking the sights and sounds of the Holy Land and, furthermore, he presents Jesus' inner feelings as he faces challenges throughout his life. Familiar to fiction readers, all these stylistic features were also employed by Arnold.

Renan had been to the Holy Land and, in his introduction, tells the reader that he had visited all the places mentioned in the gospels. He calls the land 'a fifth Gospel' because he can use his imagination to project the figure of Jesus onto the landscape (31). In offering such a picture of the Holy Land in the time of Jesus Renan presents himself as an imaginative eye to mediate the alien landscape to his European readers. Imagination, in other words, takes equal place with historical research. (It is no surprise that Biblical scholars and orthodox clergymen such as Henry Parry Liddon were dismissive of his work).⁵⁵ Similarly, Arnold gave free rein to his imagination in *The Light of Asia*, placing the figure of the historical Buddha in the Indian countryside that he had himself experienced. It is plausible to suppose that Arnold borrowed and extended this feature of style from Renan.

An emphasis on the humanity of Jesus is characteristic of Renan, as he attempts to imagine Jesus' inner feelings in the garden at Gethsemane:

The enormous weight of the mission he had accepted pressed cruelly upon Jesus. Human nature asserted itself for a time. Perhaps he began to hesitate about his work. Terror and doubt took possession of him, and threw him into a state of exhaustion worse than death. He who has sacrificed his repose, and the legitimate rewards of life, to a great idea, always experiences a feeling of revulsion when the image of death presents itself to him for the first time, and seeks to persuade him that all has been in vain. (262)

The language is highly emotional and the feelings evoked are common human ones: terror, doubt, exhaustion, and revulsion. Jesus has the same fear of death and failure

⁵³ Eliot, *Letters*, IV, 30 July 1863.

⁵⁴ Pals, "Lives", p. 32.

⁵⁵ Henry Parry Liddon's Bampton lectures of 1866, entitled 'The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', contain attacks on both Strauss and Renan.

as ordinary mortals. All sense of the divine Jesus who knows what his fate must be is eliminated. He is presented as if a character in a novel, a stylistic technique also used by Arnold in his depiction of the Buddha's emotions.

The same stylistic techniques of scene-painting, imagining Jesus' inner feelings and the employment of a clear, readable style were used by Dean Farrar in a book that may be characterised as the conservative response to Renan, published in 1874. Farrar and Arnold had known each other since they were both students at King's College London and corresponded with each other in classical Greek for the whole of their lives.⁵⁶ I now turn to a consideration of this very different work, to which, I argue, *The Light of Asia* is a direct response.

Dean Farrar's *Life of Christ*

The Life of Christ by Frederick W. Farrar, later Dean of Canterbury, was one of the publishing sensations of 1874, much as Arnold's poem was to be in 1879. The work was commissioned by the publishers Cassell, Petter and Galpin who wanted a 'real scholar' capable of writing a popular life of Christ.⁵⁷ Farrar, then Headmaster of Marlborough, was not the first choice, but as a scholar and an experienced author, he was well suited to the task. Its success exceeded all expectations. In a short time it was issued in thirty editions and sold over one hundred thousand copies.⁵⁸ Arnold was invited to review the book by Farrar for the *Daily Telegraph* but did not feel able to, and the reasons he gives, in a letter written on 2 July 1874, shed light on his religious thinking at the time.⁵⁹ In spite of the somewhat clotted prose of the letter, a clear line of thought emerges: Arnold does not see Christ and Christianity as being the only source of morality and value, and he argues that other religions have valid ethical and moral systems. He does not agree with the orthodox claims of Jesus' uniqueness and refuses to ascribe to Jesus the origin of all moral ideas, expecting 'many and many Christs' to come. Although the letter does not explicitly argue for the Buddha as a new Jesus and Buddhist ethics as an alternative to Christian morality, it is possible that Arnold conceived the project of writing *The Light of Asia*

⁵⁶ Wright, *Interpreter*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Simon Nowell-Smith, *The House of Cassell 1848–1958* (London: Cassell, 1958), p. 96.

⁵⁸ Pals, "Lives", p. 79.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Reginald Farrar, *The Life of Frederic William Farrar* (London: Nisbet, 1904), pp. 203–04.

as a rejoinder to Farrar's *Life of Christ*, and, when he came to do so, utilised some of the narrative techniques that had made Farrar's book a best-seller, including the presentation of the Buddha's human struggles, the detailed description of the landscape and a lively narrative style.

The success of Farrar's *Life of Christ* may be partly attributed to his conservative theological stance on the historicity of the gospels, against which Arnold was reacting. The very title with its employment of the title 'Christ' rather than the name 'Jesus' proclaims that it will be a life of the divine Christ rather than a life of the human Jesus like Renan's. Though Farrar was liberal in many respects — his book *Eternal Hope* (1878) questioned the doctrine of eternal punishment — he is orthodox concerning miracles, and he appealed to those readers who found Strauss and Renan too radical.⁶⁰ For Farrar the miracles of Jesus are historical and signs of his divine power, as illustrated in his discussion of the changing of the water into wine:

It was His first "sign", yet how unlike all that we should have expected, how simply unobtrusive, how divinely calm! The method, indeed, of the miracle — which is far more wonderful in character than the ordinary miracles of healing — transcends our powers of conception.⁶¹

In this way Farrar neatly sidesteps all need for debate about the nature of miracle, since he claims that miracles are beyond human understanding. He also asserts the historical truth of the resurrection, in contrast to Strauss and Renan. Only a physical raising of Jesus from the dead can explain the change of belief of the disciples — who had been despondent at Jesus' death — and the rapid spread of Christianity. Farrar firmly asserts the historical truth of the whole of the gospel record and in this respect his work continues the ancient tradition of a harmony between the gospels. For instance, he solves the problem of when Christ performed the cleansing of the Temple very simply. John's gospel — which places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry — and the Synoptic Gospels — which place it at the beginning of the final week of Jesus' life — are both correct, because Jesus performed the action twice,

⁶⁰ Farrar explicitly attacks Renan's ideas in his preface to *The Life of Christ*, and he called Strauss's work 'the reduction ad horribile of current scepticism' in his *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 39.

⁶¹ Frederick W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (London: Cassell, 1894), pp. 120–21. Further references are given in the text.

once at the beginning and once at the end of his ministry:

The main act which distinguished it [Jesus' first Passover] was the purification of the Temple — an act so ineffectual to conquer the besetting vice of the Jews that He was obliged to repeat it, with expressions still more stern, at the close of His ministry. (131–32)

Jesus had to repeat the action again, in other words, because it did not have the desired effect on the Jewish authorities the first time around, a theory that for the modern reader may preserve the historicity of the gospel narratives but only at the price of historical implausibility.

Farrar's book, though, is more than a deeply orthodox work which attempts a harmony of the gospel narratives. His evocation of the sights and sounds of Palestine, almost certainly in imitation of Renan, helps to bring the narrative to life. Like Renan, he had visited the Holy Land, and, again like Renan, it had made a great impression on him: 'Amid those scenes wherein He moved [...] many things came home to me for the first time, with a reality and vividness unknown before' (vi).⁶²

Both authors are drawing on a new genre that began to emerge at the time, that of the travel memoir of the Holy Land.⁶³ It was at this time that British travellers began to visit Palestine.⁶⁴ In 1856 A. P. Stanley, the prominent Broad Churchman, then Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, published *Sinai and Palestine*, a record of his trip to Palestine in 1853. Stanley, too, envisages Jesus among the landscapes that he witnesses, and stresses the familiarity of the scenes along with their alien qualities. *Sinai and Palestine* was an immense success, so much so that when the Prince of Wales decided to visit Palestine in 1862 he asked Stanley to accompany him.⁶⁵ By 1865 the Palestine Exploration Fund was established.⁶⁶ The first Cook's tour took place in 1869, following the first American package tour two years earlier, on which Mark Twain was a somewhat sceptical participant, summing up his impressions in the dismissive sentence, 'Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince'.⁶⁷ Most participants, though, did enthuse about the

⁶² Cassell, the publishers, financed Farrar's trip to the Holy Land.

⁶³ The Victorians used 'The Holy Land' and 'Palestine' to mean the same territory.

⁶⁴ Larsen, *Contested Christianity*, pp. 29–39.

⁶⁵ Larsen, *Contested Christianity*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ Pals, "Lives", p. 29.

⁶⁷ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Signet Classics, 1966), p. 441.

scenery: ‘The River Jordan, the Dead Sea, fields near Bethlehem where shepherds watched their flocks — these were the kind of places that roused their hearts [the travellers’] to reverent awe, delight and worship’.⁶⁸ By 1873, four hundred people had visited the Holy Land in the care of Thomas Cook, and by 1891 the figure was twelve thousand. Farrar’s description of the scenery of Palestine thus utilises a new and popular genre, in which the conventions of travel writing are used to suggest to the reader the sights and sounds of the Palestine in which Jesus lived. Arnold does something similar when he describes the landscape of India to evoke the country where the Buddha was born.

In Farrar’s text, Palestine is simultaneously alien and familiar. In his description of the Sea of Tiberias in Galilee, he emphasises the ‘glittering crystal’ of the lake, its strange position five hundred feet below sea level and the ‘burning’ and ‘enervating’ heat of the valley in which it is situated, activating the familiar trope of the energy-sapping properties of the East. Yet the landscape is also comfortingly recognisable: there are kingfishers, catching fish, rivulets ‘tumbling down the hill-sides’ and a variety of foliage, all sights that can be seen in an English landscape (126).

Similarly, Arnold makes considerable use of scene-painting in his poem, drawing on his own experiences of being in India from 1857 to 1860. One example comes from the third book of his poem and is nowhere to be found in any of his sources. Prince Gautama’s father is preparing for his son’s first encounter with the outside world, and concerned that everything should look attractive and that there should be no sign of illness, disease or death:

Therefore the stones were swept, and up and down
The water-carriers sprinkled all the streets
From spicing skins, the housewives scattered fresh
Red powder on their thresholds, strung new wreaths,
And trimmed the tulsi-bush before their doors.
The paintings on the walls were heightened up
With liberal brush, the trees set thick with flags,
The idols gilded [...] so that the city seemed
A capital of some enchanted land. (37)

The scene is simultaneously domestic and exotic. The familiar sight of women

⁶⁸ Larsen, *Contested Christianity*, p. 33.

cleaning is set in a culture in which red powder is sprinkled on the thresholds of doors and idols are 'gilded' to look attractive. The 'idols' — images of the Hindu gods — are not threatening or alienating but homely statues to be spruced up for the visit of a prince.

Arnold also emphasises the exotic in his long description of the scene in which Prince Gautama agonises about whether to leave his wife and child. The harem of the Prince is evoked in sensuous, sub-Keatsian terms:

The purdah hung,
Crimson and blue, with brodered threads of gold,
Across a portal carved in sandal-wood;
[...] All the walls were plates of pearl,
Cut shapely from the shells of Lanka's wave;
And o'er the alabaster roof there ran
Rich inlayings of lotus and of bird,
Wrought in skilled work of lazulite and jade,
Jacynth and jasper. (56)

However, into this exotic scene Arnold presents a domestic scene of a conflict between love and duty, as I have already indicated. The Prince is presented as emotionally torn in a way that readers could recognise. This conflict between love and duty, not found in the Buddhist sources, is presented in very human terms. The Prince looks one last time on his sleeping wife:

So, with his brow he touched her feet, and bent
The farewell of fond eyes, unutterable,
Upon her sleeping face, still wet with tears;
And thrice around the bed in reverence,
As though it were an altar, softly stepped
With clasped hands laid upon his beating heart,
"For never", spake he, "lie I there again!"
And thrice he made to go, but thrice came back
So strong her beauty was, so large his love. (165)

Here Arnold is drawing from, and modifying for his own story's purposes, the narrative methods of the 'life' accounts of Christ popularised by Farrar and Renan, who both use semi-novelistic descriptions of the inner life and emotions of Jesus. Farrar, while not conceding for one moment that Jesus is anything other than perfectly sinless and divine, nevertheless presents Jesus as capable of human emotions. He writes of the temptations:

He hungered. And this was the tempter's moment [...] When the

enthusiasm is spent, when the exaltation dies away, when the fire burns low, when Nature, weary and overstrained, reasserts her rights — in a word, when a mighty reaction has begun, which leaves the man suffering, spiritless, exhausted — then is the hour of extreme danger, and that has been, in many a fatal instance, the moment in which a man has fallen a victim to insidious allurements or bold assault. (87–88)

The tone is dramatic and rhetorical, presenting a man struggling with extreme forces. He builds up the subordinate clauses by use of repetition to the climax: ‘then is the hour of extreme danger’. Nature is personified as a weary mother looking after her exhausted children. Farrar’s use of generalization — ‘a man has fallen victim’ — encourages readers to identify with the human side of Christ, just as Arnold does in his depiction of Prince Gautama as a loving husband.

As well as presenting the Buddha as a recognisably human figure after the model of the human Jesus of Farrar and Renan, Arnold also shows him as a reformer struggling against hostile religious forces. The Hindu ascetics whom the Buddha encountered before his enlightenment are described as:

A gaunt and mournful band, dwelling apart.
Some day and night had stood with lifted arms,
Till — drained of blood and withered by disease —
Their slowly wasting joints and stiffened limbs
Jutted from sapless shoulders like dead forks
With corpses for their company [...]
So gathered they, a grievous company;
Crowns blistered by the blazing heat, eyes bleared,
Sinews and muscles shrivelled, visages
Haggard and wan as slain men’s, five days dead. (75–76)

The entire description goes on for 37 lines and is, as Sastri says,

horrible and grotesque [...] It is a deliberately sensational and phantasmagorical picture of ascetic religious practices calculated to shock and titillate his readers. [In the original source] the arguments of the Brahmins are as cogent and satisfactory as those of Gautama [and] expressed their desire to follow him as disciples.⁶⁹

In contrast with the Hinduism of the day which is presented as revolting and incomprehensible, then, Buddhism emerges as a much more enlightened and sympathetic religion, one more in tune with the sensibilities of Arnold’s readers. Hinduism is presented as the incomprehensible other in the poem.

⁶⁹ Sastri, *Arnold*, pp. 120, 121, 122.

Again, this can be compared to Renan. His portrait of the Jews at the time of Jesus is harsh, though not of course uncommon at the time:

The narrow, hard, and uncharitable Law was only made for the children of Abraham. Jesus maintained that every well-disposed man, every man who received and loved him, was a son of Abraham. The pride of blood appeared to him the great enemy which was to be combated. In other words, Jesus was no longer a Jew [...] He proclaimed the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew; the religion of man, not the religion of the Jew; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew. (168–69)

Elsewhere, Renan generalises:

One of the principal defects of the Jewish race is its harshness in controversy, and the abusive tone which it almost always infuses into it. There never were in the world such bitter quarrels as those of the Jews among themselves. It is the faculty of nice discernment which makes the polished and moderate man. Now, the lack of this faculty is one of the most constant features of the Semitic mind. (229)

Farrar, too, presents a hostile picture of Judaism, especially of the Jewish sects at the time of Jesus. He sees the persecution of Jews throughout history as punishment for their killing of Christ. He quotes Renan: ‘It seems as though the whole race had appointed a rendezvous for their extermination [because of the death of Christ]’ (609). He quickly adds a footnote stating that he does not mean this in a vindictive spirit, but the effect is chilling for a modern reader. The place of Judaism in Renan and Farrar is replaced by Hinduism in Arnold’s poem.

Reading *The Light of Asia* alongside Renan’s *The Life of Jesus* and Farrar’s *The Life of Christ*, therefore, shows us stylistic similarities in all three works, namely the use of scene setting, the portrayal of the inner feelings of a religious figure, and the construction of an obstructive and hostile ‘other’. Furthermore, Arnold presents a human rather than a divine Buddha and one who refused to perform miracles, echoing Renan’s presentation of a human Jesus whose miracles are to be understood naturalistically.

Although Kipling never wrote explicitly about *The Light of Asia*, he did read the poem at school.⁷⁰ It is plausible to suggest that he framed *Kim* partly as a

⁷⁰ This is confirmed by his school friend George Beresford, who remembers that Kipling was ‘the apostle of Buddha or Arnold’ for a time and preached ‘reincarnation to his room-

response to Arnold and his Christianised version of the Buddha conceived in the tradition of the lives of Jesus. Kipling's, though, is a very different agenda. For him, Buddhism gains its value and worth because it is *not* like the religion that Kipling had encountered in its most evangelical form in his childhood, an experience which, as all commentators agree, had a profound effect on his thinking. Kipling's passionate critique of a narrow form of evangelical Christianity informed much of his early writing. (At the same time, it is true that in his later stories such as 'The Gardener' (1925), in which for the first time he portrays a compassionate Christ, Kipling shows a more nuanced and generous view of the Christian religion). For the young Kipling, though, who could see Christianity only in a negative light, Buddhism fulfilled the role of a religion which was both peaceful and loving, as my next section will explore.

Liberation from 'The House of Desolation'

As is well known, Kipling and his sister Trix were sent to England at the ages of five and three respectively to be fostered by a family called Holloway in Southsea. The children remained there for six years without seeing their parents, during which time the young Kipling was cruelly and harshly treated by Mrs Holloway and her son. Kipling wrote of this experience three times, once in his autobiography *Something of Myself* (1937) and twice in fiction, in the story 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' (1888) and in the opening pages of his first novel *The Light that Failed* (1890). In his famously reticent autobiography, which does not for instance mention the deaths of two of his own children, Kipling powerfully recalls the treatment meted out to him in Southsea:

It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of Hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors [...] I was regularly beaten [...] I have known a certain amount of bullying, but this was calculated torture [...] I was well beaten [for concealing a school report] and sent to school through the streets of Southsea with the placard 'Liar' between my shoulders [...] In the long run these things, and many more of the like, drained me of any capacity for real, personal hate for the rest of my days.⁷¹

mates' though 'none too seriously'. G. C. Beresford, *School Days with Kipling*, quoted in Allen, *Kipling Sahib*, pp. 97–98.

⁷¹ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: for my Friends Known and Unknown* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.10, p. 18. Further references are given in the text.

Kipling's experiences of evangelical Christianity may have drained him of the 'capacity for real, personal hate', as he asserts, but they certainly left him with an abiding dislike, if not hatred, of the kind of punitive religious moralism practised by Mrs Holloway. Kipling encountered Buddhism for the first time shortly after he was released from 'The House of Desolation', and it is perhaps no surprise that in his writings Buddhism and Christianity are configured as polar opposites, the first as a gentle and tolerant religion, the second as prejudiced, cruel, and unloving.

When Kipling's ordeal in Southsea ended his mother took the children to live in a farm-house on the edge of Epping Forest, where he ran 'wild' and where he 'was not encouraged to refer to any guilty past' (18). Immediately following this experience of freedom and play the family moved to the Brompton Road, where Kipling had his first encounters with Buddhist art, at the South Kensington Museum.⁷² Kipling had a strong family connection because his father, John Lockwood Kipling, had worked there from 1860 to 1864, and Kipling records in his autobiography that he and his sister visited the Museum where they saw Buddhist statues.⁷³ He specifically mentions one of these statues, the 'big Buddha with the little door in his back'. His first experiences of Buddhism were as part of a happy and guilt-free time he spent with his mother and sister when the two children had season tickets to the Museum and 'roved at will' (20).

The large statue that attracted Kipling was almost certainly the same bronze mentioned by Moncure Daniel Conway, the American freethinker, in his 1882 book *Travels in South Kensington* and is indeed an imposing and impressive figure, six

Kipling's memories are confirmed by his sister Trix and may be accepted as substantially accurate.

⁷² He would not have encountered any Buddhists as a very young child in Bombay. Edmund Wilson's assertion that 'Kipling has been seriously influenced by the Buddhism which he had imbibed with his first language in his boyhood' has no supporting evidence. Edmund Wilson, 'The Kipling that Nobody Read', in *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), pp. 17–69 (p. 57).

⁷³ The South Kensington Museum had been opened in 1857 and had a section for Oriental art. The greatest Buddhist treasure (which Kipling would certainly have seen) was the Amaravati stupa [burial mound] which was situated at the entrance to the South Kensington Museum and contained images of the lotus, the Bodhi-tree, the footsteps of the Buddha and the Buddha as Bodhisattva, a spiritual being. See Figure 1. It is possible that Kipling also went to the British Museum to see the 'Colossal Gilt figure of the Burmese deity Gaudama' which had been presented to the Museum in 1826 by Captain Marryat and a 'large stone representing on its face the impression of the foot of Gaudma [sic] carved and gilt', which is still to be seen in the Museum. See Ralph Isaacs, 'Captain Marryat's Burmese collection and the Rath, or Burmese Imperial State Carriage', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 17 (2005), 45–71 (p. 46).

metres tall.⁷⁴ (It actually represents Kwan-Yin, the Chinese Buddhist goddess of compassion, often confused with representations of the Buddha in the nineteenth century). In his book Conway records the impressions of a young girl on seeing this statue in the South Kensington Museum:

It is interesting to observe the strong impression made upon the casual visitors by this face so sweetly serene, so free from the lines which care and ambition trace upon the European face. I heard a little girl of thirteen years old say, after her silent gaze, 'How I would like to climb up and sit in his lap! Perhaps I would get some of his goodness!'⁷⁵

On the one hand the statue as described is clearly orientalised: its serenity is contrasted with the ambitious activity characteristic of the Westerner, and indeed of the museum-goers. On the other hand it is also presented as an object of wonder, not merely an artefact to be marvelled at in a museum, but a source of moral virtue. Kipling does not record his impressions of the statue in his autobiography, but it would be surprising if he, too, were not struck by the expression of peace and calm on the face, so different from the agonies often portrayed in images of the crucified Christ.

After completing his schooling, Kipling returned to India in 1881 and became acquainted with the Buddhist statues in the Lahore Museum, of which his father, Lockwood, had been appointed curator in 1875.⁷⁶ Kipling's precise descriptions of the artefacts in the Lahore Museum in *Kim* are thus based on first-hand experience. Until he took up a post as a journalist on the *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1881,

⁷⁴ It is now in the Fa Yue Buddhist Temple, Brierley Hill, having been given to the community in 1996. See George D. Chryssides, 'A Young Buddhist Nun at a Ch'an Temple in the English Midlands', in *Understanding Buddhism through the Lives of Practitioners*, ed. by Todd Lewis (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 80–86 (p. 82). My contention that Kipling's statue is the same as the one mentioned by Conway and is now in Brierley Hill was confirmed by John Clarke, Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in a private conversation.

⁷⁵ Moncure Daniel Conway, *Travels in South Kensington: with Notes on Decorative Art and Architecture in England* (London: Trubner, 1882), p. 64. Conway Hall in London is named after Moncure Daniel Conway.

⁷⁶ The Lahore Museum, which had been established in March 1856, was refurbished in 1867 and the fabled gun Zamzamah, a symbol of Sikh authority in the Punjab, was placed immediately in front of the museum entrance. In the same year Thomas Thornton, the Museum's part-time curator, used his authority as secretary to the Punjab Government to issue an instruction to every official in the Punjab to send in objects or curiosities of historical or aesthetic interest to be sent in to the museum. The museum gained an eclectic range of exhibits and world-wide fame. It became known locally as the Ajaib-Ghar or Wonder House, a name that is used by Kipling in *Kim*. See M. Naeem Qureishi, 'A Museum for British Lahore', *History Today*, 47 (1977), 71–73.

Kipling worked at the museum and helped to guide visitors around the displays.⁷⁷ Such was the fame of the Museum and particularly its Graeco-Buddhist statues (Buddhist statues with a discernible Greek influence) that the number of visitors soared from 27,390 during 1869 to 251,003 in 1884. A list of photographic negatives of Buddhist sculptures displayed in the Museum, published by Lockwood Kipling in 1889, records many different images of the Buddha: in infancy, teaching, calming an intoxicated elephant, being tempted, renouncing the world and being enlightened, in death and being enthroned.⁷⁸ Elsewhere Lockwood Kipling wrote approvingly that the sculptures' 'value as elucidating the obscure early history of the Buddhist faith is very great'.⁷⁹ For Kipling's father, then, the Buddhist art had predominantly an educational role for Westerners rather than any spiritual significance, but Kipling himself was aware of the statues' religious meaning for a devout Buddhist. He presents this contrast between intellectual and spiritual responses to the art of the Lahore Museum in the celebrated opening pages of *Kim*, as I explore in detail in a later chapter.

As well as becoming acquainted with Buddhist legends portrayed in sculpture in the Lahore Museum, Kipling may have encountered actual pilgrims from Tibet visiting Lahore on their way to the holy places of Buddhism in India. Peter Hopkirk quotes a letter from Lockwood Kipling to Aurel Stein, the archaeologist, written in 1902: 'I wonder if you have read my son's *Kim* and recognise an old lama whom you saw at the old Museum and at the school'.⁸⁰ Tibetan lamas certainly visited the holy places in India associated with Buddhism at

⁷⁷ Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 87.

⁷⁸ J. L. Kipling, *Descriptive List of Photographic Sculptures in the Lahore Central Museum* (Lahore: Punjab Government Press, 1889). For photographic illustrations of the sculptures that Kipling would have known, see H. Hargreaves, *The Buddha Story in Stone* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1924). The explorer Gertrude Bell took photos of the sculptures in 1902.

⁷⁹ Thomas Thornton and J. L. Kipling, *Lahore* (Lahore: Government Civil Secretariat Press, 1876), pp. 66–67.

⁸⁰ Peter Hopkirk, *Quest for Kim: In Search of Kipling's Great Game* (London: John Murray, 1996), p. 41. Alan Trevithick quotes from a Government of India official document of 1878 giving two Buddhist monks from Tibet permission to proceed on a pilgrimage in India in *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage to Bodh-Gaya (1811–1949)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), p. 3. See also Giuseppe Tucci, *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1940), pp. 14–15. Tucci claims that he had a conversation with Sir Aurel Stein in which Stein asserted that the young Kipling had met and been impressed by a Tibetan *sadhu* [holy man] in Lahore. According to Stein, 'the impression never faded from his [Kipling's] memory'.

the time that Kipling and his father were in Lahore. In fact, visits to India and its Buddhist shrines by Tibetan pilgrims can be dated with confidence back to the eleventh century.⁸¹ When the British Government took control of the Hill States of the western Himalayas, it became easier for pilgrims from that area to visit India. Alexander Gerard (1792–1839), an early nineteenth-century traveller in that region, records:

There is a sect of wandering Tatars [Tibetans] called Khampa, who are in some respects similar to the Jogees [yogis] of Hindustan. They visit the sacred places, and many of them subsist wholly by begging.⁸²

It is therefore likely that Kipling and his father did encounter Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims in Lahore. In addition, Kipling was exploring written sources about Buddhism, as we can infer from the books mentioned as belonging to the museum curator in *Kim*. Two authors in particular are mentioned, Samuel Beal and Stanislas Julien. Beal's work *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (1875), a translation from the Chinese, was a source for Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. Beal also translated the memoirs of Chinese pilgrims who in the fourth, fifth, and seventh centuries CE travelled to India and took back Buddhist scriptures to China. One of these memoirs, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, was translated into French by the Chinese scholar Stanislaus Julien in 1856, and probably read by both Lockwood Kipling and his son.

The books and statues in the Lahore Museum therefore gave Kipling considerable access to some of the key beliefs of Buddhism, as well as some of its important early texts. Just as in politics Kipling was always keen to stress his role as an insider, one of the few who really understands India and its people, so too in religion he counters any assimilation of Buddhism (as he understands it) to Christianity or the 'perennial religion' espoused by theosophy.⁸³ Instead he emphasises the specificity and difference of Buddhism. Underpinning this belief were two formative experiences in Japan that complete my account of the very different 'object' that Buddhism represented for Arnold and Kipling, and thus the differences in the Buddhism that they, in turn, presented in their poem and novel respectively.

⁸¹ Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 59.

⁸² Quoted in Huber, *The Holy Land*, p. 237.

⁸³ This point is further developed in Chapter 2.

Epiphany in Japan

Kipling's encounters with Buddhist art in Japan in 1889 and 1892 seem to have had a profound emotional effect on him and, perhaps, spurred a conviction that Buddhism could be imagined as a religion able to counter the oppressive values of Christianity. Unlike Arnold, who only encountered Buddhism as a living faith after he had written *The Light of Asia*, Kipling visited Japan twice prior to writing *Kim*.⁸⁴ These visits were significant in changing his perceptions of Buddhism: he records an emotional response to the statues at the Nikko river in 1888, and his poem 'The Buddha at Kamakura' (1892) explicitly renders Buddhism as a peaceful and loving religion, in contrast to an intolerant and violent evangelical Christianity. This marks a new stage in Kipling's thinking about religion. His hostility to evangelical Christianity is clear right from the first story in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, 'Lispeth' (1888), in which a young girl from the Himalayan foothills is taken in by missionaries and then treated cruelly by them. This negative and bitter representation of Christianity as cruel and destructive continues in 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' (1888) and *The Light that Failed* (1890). However his visit to Japan in 1892 provides imaginative scope not just for critique but for an alternative religious value when, for the first time, he makes an explicit contrast between Buddhism and Christianity, a contrast that is taken to its fullest flourishing in *Kim*.

Kipling's first visit to Japan in 1888 prepared the way for a decisive change in his assessment of Buddhism as an alternative religion four years later. On this first visit he records his impressions as those of an appreciative tourist. Visiting Kyoto he saw 'gorgeously attired Buddhist monks chanting Pali texts', noting ironically that although so beautifully attired, they chanted 'in honour of the Apostle of Unworldliness'. But there is surely a change in his attitude when at the Nikko river he came across 'fifty or sixty cross-legged images which the untrained eye put down immediately as so many small Buddhas'. Enquiring about the significance of the figures, Kipling was told that they were

⁸⁴ These experiences were not unique to Kipling, since tourism to Japan increased significantly after the opening up of the country in the Meiji period in the 1850s. See Hiroyaki Suzuki, 'The Buddha of Kamakura and the "Modernization" of Buddhist Statuary in the Meiji Period', *Transcultural Studies* (2011) <<http://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/transcultural/article/view>> [accessed 3 December 2014].

images of the God who Plays with Little Children in the Sky [children who have died]. He tells them stories and builds them houses of pebbles [...] Thereafter the images took a new aspect in my eyes and were no longer 'Graeco-Buddhist sculptures' but personal friends.⁸⁵

Kipling recognises in himself an emotional response to the statues, which he claims no longer to see as antiquarian curiosities whose rightful place is in a museum, thus going beyond the curatorial impulses of his father. He does not respond to the statues as religious objects, but as representations of friendship and images of care, as he 'feels' Buddhism as a religion of love. The image of a god who plays with children rather than punishing them opens up new and personally resonant ways for Kipling to imagine the religious life of a practising Buddhist.

The contrast between evangelical Christianity as punitive and intolerant and Buddhism as peaceful and kindly comes to the fore in 'The Buddha at Kamakura' (1892), a poem Kipling wrote on a second visit to Japan, on his honeymoon. It is possible that Edwin Arnold himself advised Kipling to visit the giant and imposing statue when the two men met for the first and only time in Yokohama in April 1892.⁸⁶ The statue of Buddha at Kamakura, known as Daibutsu, was much commented on by Western visitors and many recorded their awed respect for what they saw. For instance, the British artist Alfred Parsons writes of:

Daibutsu, an enormous bronze Buddha, not only remarkable for its size, but also for being the finest and most dignified production which the art of Japan can show.⁸⁷

Not all visitors were impressed, however. Missionaries such as the American E. Warren Clark, who were invariably hostile to Buddhism, saw it as a figure to be feared. Clark writes about two visits to the same giant Buddha at Kamakura. On his first visit he studied the image 'as a work of art' and then climbed up into his 'capacious lap, and sat upon one of his thumbs'. Clark then began to sing the Christian doxology ['Glory be to the Father, and to the Son ...']. A year later he visited with six other people, 'and we told the priest we were praising the TRUE GOD, that the time was on hand when idolatry in Japan was going down, never to

⁸⁵ The letters from which these quotations are taken were originally published in the *Pioneer* and have been republished in *Kipling's Japan: Collected Writings*, ed. by Hugh Cortazzi and George Webb (London: Athlone Press, 1988), pp. 89, 155.

⁸⁶ Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 338.

⁸⁷ Alfred Parsons, *Notes in Japan* (New York: Harper Bros., 1896), pp. 110–11.

rise again'.⁸⁸ It is this attitude that Kipling attacks in his poem.

'The Buddha at Kamakura' represents Kipling's first imaginative engagement with the Buddhist religion to be published. It appeared first in *The Times* on July 2 1892 as the closing statement of an article 'The Edge of the East' which Kipling later collected as *Letters of Travel* (1920). In the article that precedes the poem Kipling describes the statue:

The great bronze Buddha sits facing the sea to hear the centuries go by.
He has been described again and again — his majesty, his aloofness, and
every one of his dimensions, the smoky little shrine within him, and the
plumed hill that makes the background to his throne. For that reason he
remains, as he remained from the beginning, beyond all hope of
description — as it might be, a visible god sitting in the garden of a
world new made.

No prose, Kipling intimates, can do justice to the power of the statue. It is necessary to experience it as a religious object and to gaze on it without the preconceptions imposed by commentators. Then you can feel 'the soul of all the east' — a phrase from verse six of the poem — and see a 'visible god'. The poem does in fact describe the statue but also attempts to posit and understand its religious significance in a way that provides an important interpretative tool for the reading of *Kim*. The first three chapters of the novel, in which the lama first appears, are headed with verses from the poem, and the lama himself quotes from the poem when he first encounters the statues in the Lahore Museum. As I argue in Chapter 4, this is a way for Kipling to place himself within the scene, not just as a respectful Westerner but as someone who understands and reveres Buddhism without being an actual adherent.

In the newspaper article in which the poem first appeared, Kipling sets the scene for the poem with the following remarks:

At the entrance to the gardens [in Kamakura] there is a quaint little
printed appeal, half pathetic and half dignified, put forward by the priests
of the place, for reverence and decent behaviour on the part of the
visitors. It might, perhaps, be done into rhyme, something after this

⁸⁸ E. Warren Clark, *Life and Adventures in Japan*, quoted in *Kipling's Japan*, p. 206.

style.⁸⁹

The poem that follows is in the voice of a Buddhist monk appealing for tolerance from Western visitors, as the first verse makes explicit:

Oh ye who tread the narrow way
By Tophet-flare to Judgment Day
Be gentle when the heathen pray
To Buddha at Kamukara.⁹⁰

The contrast between Buddhism and Christianity is foregrounded from the start. The ‘narrow way’ is a reference to Matthew 7.14 and refers to the way that disciples of Jesus must follow. Here the reference is to evangelical Protestants who believe in Hell and Judgement, since Tophet is a synonym for Hell. Originally in the Old Testament Tophet refers to the valley in which the Jews sacrificed children to the pagan god Moloch during one of their periods of apostasy, as Kipling with his thorough knowledge of the Bible would have known.⁹¹ Evangelical Protestantism is therefore associated with the destruction of children by the mention of Tophet, a reference that surely points to Kipling’s childhood experience. The ‘narrow way’ is, again by implication, contrasted with the ‘Middle Way’ of Buddhism, usually understood as the mean between asceticism and luxury that Prince Gautama discovered on his spiritual quest, and here implying a tolerant and loving way of life. The mention of ‘the heathen’ therefore becomes deeply ironic, as a judgement passed on Buddhists by ignorant Westerners without understanding of religion or culture. It is these intolerant Westerners who are the true heathens, as is clear by the end of the poem, in which the Western tourists are characterised with open contempt. They are the ‘beef-fed zealots’ who believe that the statue is ‘a tourist’s-show, a legend told/A rusting hulk of bronze and gold’. (While Hindus are mentioned as controlling the sacred Buddhist site of ‘Buddh-gaya’ they are not the main target of the poem, since Hindus do not eat beef.) Kipling’s anti-Western stance is clearly demonstrated in the

⁸⁹ All quotations from this section are from *The Times* 2 July, 1892, p. 12 <<http://find.galegroup.com>> [accessed 4/12/2014]. Kipling revised the poem several times; this is the original version. The notice that Kipling paraphrases is almost certainly one recorded in 1918 and still there today, ‘Stranger, whosoever thou art, and whatsoever be thy creed, when thou enterest this sanctuary remember thou treadest upon ground hallowed by the worship of ages. This is the temple of Buddha and the gate of the Eternal, and should therefore be entered with reverence’. See *Kipling’s Japan*, p. 207.

⁹⁰ The poem is cited in full in *Kipling’s Japan*, pp. 202–04. Further references are given in the text.

⁹¹ II Kings 23.10.

final verse:

But when the morning-prayer is prayed
Think, ere ye pass to strife or trade,
Is God in man's own image made
No nearer than Kamakura? (204)

The hostile Christian missionaries who spread 'strife' are just as repugnant as traders who are only interested in conquest for their own profit and are totally ignorant of Eastern culture and religion. The last two lines invite all such Westerners, and by implication the reader, to consider the statue as an image of the divine. Still in the voice of a Buddhist monk, the speaker rhetorically asks whether any such image of the divine can be found nearer than Kamakura. The implication is that the statue embodies divine qualities more nearly than violent depictions of a crucified Christ.

Kipling implies in the poem that Buddhist worship is to be taken seriously and not mocked:

Yet spare us still the Western joke
When joss-sticks turn to scented smoke
The little sins of little folk
That worship at Kamakura. (203)

The 'joss-sticks' are the incense burned in Buddhist temples to symbolise the moral qualities of the Buddha, as the modern Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey explains:

The Buddha had an 'odour of sanctity', a certain 'air' about him suggestive of his glorious character and virtues. Incense both reminds a person of this and also creates a sense of delight, which can then be focused on the Buddha.⁹²

Instead of focusing on sin, then, as Kipling had been forced to do as a child, the Buddhist worshipper is encouraged to reflect on the moral perfections of the Buddha through the powerful scents of incense. Kipling asserts here that joss-sticks are not to be joked about (or associated dismissively with Roman Catholic practices) but to be celebrated as a means for focusing the mind on positive virtue rather than the negative guilt-and-fear laden effects of sin.

As well as an exemplar of supreme moral virtue, the Buddha is also presented

⁹² Peter Harvey, 'Devotional Practices', in *Buddhism*, ed. by Peter Harvey (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 125–44 (p. 134).

as a figure of love in the poem. The importance of affection was keenly felt by Kipling when the Buddhist statues at the Nikko river seemed to him like personal friends. That idea is developed here. Although the Buddha is portrayed as beyond human emotion, because he ‘neither burns nor sees’, he is also a figure of love who cherishes ‘the grey-robed, gay-sashed butterflies’. The phrase ‘gay-sashed butterflies’ has a dual reference, both to the Buddhist monks who attend to the statue and, more generally, to butterflies who symbolise the natural world, and that the Buddha loves. Love is an important element in Kipling’s configuring of Buddhism and is a major element of his presentation of the relationship between the lama and his chela [disciple] Kim, as I explore later in the thesis.⁹³

In the poem Kipling aligns himself with the priest in whose voice he speaks as sharing with him a real knowledge of Buddhism. He refers to the Buddha’s cousin and first disciple, Ananda, to his mother Maya, to his enemy Devadatta and to the previous lives of the Buddha in animal form. For the first time in his writings, Kipling also articulates the Tibetan Buddhism mantra ‘Om mane padme hum’ [Hail to the jewel in the lotus]:

And down the loaded air there comes
A thunder of Tibetan drums,
And droned *Om mane padme hum’s*
A world’s width from Kamakura. (203)

In this verse Kipling distances himself from Arnold’s Westernizing approach to Buddhism by emphasising the religion’s Eastern origins. The phrase ‘a world’s width’ suggests not only the spread of Buddhism throughout the East but also the distance between it and evangelical Christianity, which the poem makes explicit. Kipling presents an alternative religion which excites in him nothing but admiration, in its contrast, its distance, and its distinctive qualities. Kipling’s initial attraction to Buddhism is because it ‘opposes’ Christianity, but he comes to respect it for its own qualities.

In gazing on the mighty statue of Daibutz and recording his impressions in poetry, Kipling acknowledges the power of the image in religious feeling and practice. In this way he makes a break, consciously or not, with the evangelical

⁹³ There may be a particular personal reason for these feelings: Kipling had just learnt that his wife Carrie was pregnant with their first child.

Protestantism of his childhood, for which the biblical text is the sole source of religious authority. As David Morgan says, ‘No theologian inveighed against images as adamantly as the Protestant John Calvin, who declared that images can teach nothing about Christian truth, since they are the product of the human imagination and therefore inherently inaccurate on matters of divinity’.⁹⁴ In this spirit the missionary E. Warren Clark, mentioned earlier, tried to use the power of words to mitigate the religious force of the statue of the Buddha by reciting the Doxology from within the statue. In Buddhism, on the other hand, contemplating an image such as a picture or a statue is part of religious practice, intended to enable the growth of spiritual qualities possessed by the Buddha within the person meditating. Kipling shows his awareness of the importance of such a practice when he presents the lama’s feelings of awe and adoration at his first sight of the images of the Buddha in human form in the Lahore Museum.

In his imaginative presentation of Buddhism in ‘The Buddha at Kamakura’, then, Kipling constructs a sharply differing religion from Arnold in *The Light of Asia*. I have been arguing that Arnold presents a Christianised Buddha and uses the familiar genre of the lives of Jesus to model familiarity for an ‘alien’ religion. Kipling, on the other hand, uses his poem to create an opposition between the ‘beef-fed zealots’, that is, intolerant and evangelical Christians, and the peaceful statue which is expressive of love for all creation. These two different attitudes to Buddhism are emblematic of key nineteenth-century constructions of the religion, some of which saw it in opposition to Christianity and others that were intrigued by apparent similarities between Buddhism and the Christian religion.⁹⁵ In later chapters I argue that, in staking his position in this process, and using fictional narrative form to do so, Kipling was enabled to attend to the detail and texture of Buddhism in a uniquely attentive fashion.

Bodh-gaya: the Jerusalem of the East?

Arnold’s construction of the life of the Buddha in *The Light of Asia* is replete with Christian preconceptions, as I have shown, and these assumptions were carried over

⁹⁴ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 11–12. Of course there are many different traditions in Christianity about icons and visual images.

⁹⁵ For further discussion of this point, see Almond, *Discovery*, pp. 132–38.

into Arnold's political activism in the Buddhist cause, a cause which Kipling did not share. *The Light of Asia* became well-known in Buddhist countries and acquired a political importance, being taken up enthusiastically by Buddhist modernisers, especially those in Ceylon, who approved Arnold's emphasis on a modern and enlightened Buddhism which was fully in tune with modern scientific sensibilities.⁹⁶ These groups found in the poem a powerful tool to advance their cause. Arnold himself became an activist in one particular cause, restoring Bodh-gaya, legendary site of the Buddha's enlightenment, to Buddhist control.⁹⁷ Indeed Arnold initiated the project, which was then taken up with enthusiasm by Buddhist modernisers in the East.⁹⁸

Following the great success of his poem, Arnold was invited to travel to Buddhist countries and for the first time, in 1886, visited Bodh-gaya. According to his own account, he asked if he might have a leaf from a sacred tree which was thought to be the successor of the tree under which the Buddha was enlightened. The answer was, 'Pluck as many as you like, sahib [...] it is nought to us'. Arnold was shocked by what he perceived as wilful neglect of the Buddhist relics by the Hindu priest in 'the Mecca, the Jerusalem, of a million Oriental congregations'.⁹⁹ The mention of Jerusalem and the use of the word 'congregations' show that Arnold's perceptions are being mediated through Western and Christian presuppositions. Arnold then picked a handful of leaves and took them to Buddhist monks in Ceylon, where they were greeted with 'eager and passionate devotion'. Fired by the success of his initiative, Arnold suggested that the sacred site should be 'placed in the hands of a representative committee of the Buddhist nations'. The suggestion 'quickly

⁹⁶ See Martin Baumann, 'Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects', in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 85–105 (p. 88). Bishop Colenso's writings doubting the historical accuracy of the Pentateuch were known in Ceylon, as were the writings of freethinkers such as Charles Bradlaugh, which had been translated into Sinhalese and published by the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism. See *Buddhism and Christianity; Being an Oral Debate held at Panadura between the Rev. Migettuwatte Gunanda (a Buddhist Priest) and the Rev. David de Silva (a Wesleyan Clergyman)*, introduced and annotated by J. M. Peebles (Colombo: Siriwardhana, 1955), p. 155.

⁹⁷ At the time the site was managed by Hindu priests and the Buddhist artefacts had fallen into disrepair. See Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage*.

⁹⁸ For Buddhist Modernism generally, see David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁹⁹ The quotations in this paragraph are from Sir Edwin Arnold, *East and West: Being Papers Reprinted from the "Daily Telegraph" and Other Sources* (London: Longmans, 1895), p. 311.

became a universal aspiration', and Arnold started negotiations with British politicians.

Arnold quickly positioned himself in the leadership role in this campaign, seeing himself as a figure able to mediate between the British politicians who were then in charge of the site and the Buddhists of Ceylon. He used the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, which he had edited from 1860–1878, to publicise the cause, which was taken up with enthusiasm by the theosophist Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), another Westerner who saw his role as promoting Buddhism, and the Sinhalese Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933).

Arnold explicitly saw this campaign to restore Buddhist control to Bodhgaya as furthering the British imperialist cause. He writes that, because of the goodwill that would be created in Buddhist countries:

Buddhism would return to the place of its birth, to elevate, to spiritualise, to help, and enrich the population. It would be a new Asiatic crusade, triumphant without tears, or tyranny, or blood; and the Queen's administration would have the glory and benefit of it.¹⁰⁰

The word 'crusade' again suggests Arnold's Christian preconceptions, though admittedly he wishes for a bloodless one. Arnold implies that the campaign will lead to 'glory' for the Empire, just as military battles have done.

However, such emphasis on Arnold's imperialist agenda and his assumption that Bodh-gaya must function as a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists just as Jerusalem has always done for Christians only gives us part of the picture. The campaign for Bodh-gaya was a cause initiated by Westerners, but then taken up by Buddhist reformers.¹⁰¹ Just as Arnold's *The Light of Asia* had been greeted with enthusiasm in Buddhist countries in spite of its Christianising agenda, so his efforts to restore Buddhist control to the legendary site of the Buddha's enlightenment provided one important impetus to the founding of the Maha-Bodhi Society in 1891. This society was set up to further Arnold's original aims to revive the places of Buddhist pilgrimage in India, and its Patron, President, and Vice-Presidents were all practising Buddhists: the Grand Lama of Tibet was its patron, the President was a

¹⁰⁰ Arnold, *East and West*, p. 321.

¹⁰¹ For details see Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage*.

prominent Sinhalese monk, and the Vice-Presidents came from Burma, Japan, China and Ceylon.¹⁰²

The kind of dynamic interaction between East and West exemplified by Arnold's campaign to restore Buddhist control to Bodh-gaya is an important part of the transmission of Buddhism into Victorian culture. It was given traction by the publication of several articles on the subject by Arnold in the *Daily Telegraph*. While J. Jeffrey Franklin coins the term 'counter-invasion' to characterise the interest in Buddhist texts in Britain in the nineteenth century, the phrase is an inadequate description of the kind of interactive process that I have been describing, in which an initial impetus from the West is taken up with enthusiasm by Buddhists in Eastern countries. In her influential *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt characterises as a 'contact zone'

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.¹⁰³

However this characterisation does not quite fit the campaign for Bodh-Gaya. Pratt's emphasis on coercion and passivity is not an accurate depiction. Buddhists in Ceylon, Japan, Burma, and Thailand adopted Arnold's campaign with enthusiasm and a sense of agency. More helpful is Pratt's employment of the term 'transculturation' in the same book to denote the ways in which 'members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture'.¹⁰⁴ Arnold in his enthusiastic promotion of Bodh-gaya as a site for Buddhist pilgrimage and influential Buddhists in the East found common cause, and also discovered the kind of 'heterogeneity of interests' that Charles Hallisey discusses in an important essay, in which he argues against constructing a 'Manichaeian division between East and West' and stresses the connectedness of cultures as well as their difference.¹⁰⁵ It is certainly worth

¹⁰² Arnold, *East and West*, p. 315. The campaign carries on to this day.

¹⁰³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Hallisey, 'Roads Taken and not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism', in *Curators of the Buddha: the Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 31–61 (p. 33).

emphasising that, in many cases, the interest that Westerners took in Buddhism in Victorian times was enthusiastically welcomed by monks and laity in Buddhist countries, who then used this interest for their own purposes, as Dharmapala did in Ceylon and Buddhist modernisers did in Japan.¹⁰⁶

Although Kipling was aware of Arnold's efforts to restore Bodh-Gaya to Buddhist control, he took no active part in the campaign. This might seem puzzling, given Kipling's favourable views of Buddhism and his well-known approval of the imperialist project. However Kipling does not assimilate his views about religion and with politics, as Arnold does, and he never became an activist in the Buddhist cause. For Kipling, pilgrimage to a sacred place seems to have no particular resonance as such. He does not present the Buddhist search for meaning in *Kim* in terms of a journey to a particular place such as Bodh-Gaya but as the discovery of the way to Nirvana. The lama travels all over India in the search for his sacred river but in the end understands that the river that he seeks is a state of mind rather than a physical object, as Chapter 4 will explore. Buddhism for Kipling is thus about a spiritual journey that teaches forgetfulness of self and the importance of love rather than adherence to particular forms and rituals.

Before coming to consider the novel in full detail I turn first to assess Kipling's attitude to the new hybrid religion of theosophy, a syncretic system of thought that aimed to encompass all religions, including Buddhism. Kipling disliked both theosophy and theosophists, as is clear in his writings, and considered that the theosophists were charlatans who did not truly understand Buddhism, as he claims to do. Indeed, *Kim* can be profitably read as an anti-theosophical work which asserts the purity of the Buddhist faith as practised in the East by a devout monk.

¹⁰⁶ For details see McMahan, *Buddhist Modernism*.

Chapter 2

Theosophy and its Discontents

One of the striking things about Kipling as a man and a writer is the number of groups and causes that he despised. Indian nationalism, Irish home rule, German political ambitions, Liberal politicians and aesthetes were just some of the targets of his contempt and derision. Kipling is often dismissed as a reactionary imperialist, but his writing belongs to a tradition of conservative writing in England, such as that of Edmund Burke, which asserts authority on the basis of lived experience. Kipling's distinctive place within this tradition is that he claims to speak not only for England but also for India, and Indians, as well, and indeed his belief that he is able to capture an authentic Indian experience is one motivator for his powerful fable of childhood transformed by religious experience, *Kim*. While present day post-colonialist readings of Kipling rightly critique the imperial vision embodied in his orientalisising view of Indian authenticity, we must also recognise that Kipling's sense of his own rightness about India was sustained by his contempt for other Western appropriations of Indian experience. Foremost among these was the hybrid religion of theosophy, a creed which claimed to draw on an ancient occultist tradition found first in Greek and Egyptian mystery religions, and was expounded by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1890) and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). Blavatsky and Olcott believed that all religions contain a *philosophia perennis*, or perennial philosophy, a universalising rhetoric that allowed them to speak on behalf of Indian religions with the same authority as all their other pronouncements. By exploring Kipling's animosity towards theosophy, we can understand how Kipling rejected such a view, constructing for himself his own vision of authentic religious experience, which was rooted in his understanding of Indian life.

Kipling's contempt for theosophy has been noted before by critics but its significance has been little explored. J. Jeffrey Franklin, in *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire*, examines the considerable impact of theosophical ideas on popular fiction of the late Victorian period but does not read *Kim* as an anti-theosophical novel.¹ Andrew Huxley in his article 'Kim, Theosophy, and Two

¹ J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Ethnologists called Mukherji', does treat *Kim* as contesting Blavatsky's views, but the main thrust of his argument is to propose a real-life model for the character of Hurree Babu in the novel, a line of thought which is not relevant here.² My argument rather is that *Kim* is motivated in part by an anti-theosophical agenda, and that Kipling wishes to resist the syncretising project of Blavatsky and Olcott.

Kipling's father, Lockwood Kipling, met the founders of theosophy when they visited Simla in 1880, invited by the journalist Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921), later Kipling's editor at the *Pioneer*, who became a life-long adherent of the new movement. Lockwood Kipling, however, dismissed Blavatsky as a fraud, as did many others. In the light of this judgement I discuss 'The Sending of Dana Da' (1888), Kipling's satirical look at the impact of theosophy on Anglo-Indian society in Simla. I then situate Kipling's criticisms of theosophy in relation to debates about esoteric knowledge in the London periodical press of the 1890s, debates which concentrated mainly on the contested theosophical concept of 'Esoteric Buddhism'. These debates were conducted largely between Max Müller (1823–1900), the prominent Oxford scholar of philology, and A. P. Sinnett: they centre on the nature of authority in religious affairs. Müller insists that his philological scholarship is superior to Sinnett's claim to have been 'instructed' by esoteric Tibetan Masters, whereas for Sinnett such knowledge, gained by occult means, is incontestable. These arguments over the nature of authenticity and authority in religious matters form an important backdrop to *Kim*. Kipling's lama is a humble seeker after truth and a follower of the Buddhist Dharma or Way. He practises an active loving-kindness and treats people from all religious backgrounds equally. His religion is not occult or esoteric but demonstrated openly in all his actions. He comes from Tibet but is nothing like the 'Masters', or 'Mahatmas', in whom Blavatsky put her spiritual trust, who apparently dwelt in seclusion in that region and whose wisdom was only available to the privileged few. Kipling insists on the authority of his own knowledge of Buddhism and repudiates the 'Budhism' which Blavatsky declared was the true way to interpret the ancient religion.

² Andrew Huxley, 'Kim, Theosophy, and Two Ethnologists called Mukherji', *Kipling Journal*, 357 (2014), 30–43.

Kipling's objections to theosophy were in fact many. He thought that the magic tricks that Blavatsky performed as evidence of her occult powers were fraudulent and, like many, he did not believe in the existence of the 'Masters' in Tibet who, the theosophists claimed, gave spiritual authority to their new religion. He disliked the theosophists' identification with the cause of Indian nationalism. Above all, he thought that Blavatsky and Olcott had no right to reconfigure eastern religions into their grand scheme of reclaiming the tradition of ancient wisdom. In his view, the theosophists' claims to authority and knowledge in religious matters were just as bogus as the politicians' claims to know what the best political system for India was without ever having lived there. Politicians who pontificate about India without knowledge, according to Kipling, betray an ignorance which is culpable. For instance, in his story 'The Enlightenments of Pagett M. P.' (1890), the English M. P. Pagett makes a brief visit to his old school friend Orde of the Indian Civil Service to learn how India is progressing politically and is confronted by a whole series of characters who try to tell him, from their actual experience of India, that independence can never be achieved. Similarly, in 'Without Benefit of Clergy' (1890), Kipling's satire is directed at 'the Member for Lower Tooting, wandering about India in top-hat and frock-coat' who advocates universal suffrage from a position of complete ignorance.³ When the politician learns that a fellow-passenger on his ship has succumbed to cholera, he becomes scared and plans to leave India quickly. He is contrasted unfavourably with the administrators who have to live with the threat of disease every day.

Kipling's poem 'Pagett, M. P.' (1886) sums up his bitterness at the lack of knowledge and understanding of Anglo-Indian life shown by English politicians.⁴ As in the short story, Pagett is a British Parliamentarian who thinks he knows it all but finally cracks and wants to leave once the heat of the Indian summer increases. The poem ends on a note of contempt, using the voice of a colonial civil servant:

And I laughed as I drove from the station, but the mirth died out on my
lips
As I thought of the fools like Pagett who write of their 'Eastern trips',

³ Rudyard Kipling, 'Without Benefit of Clergy' in Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* (London: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 149–72 (p. 171).

⁴ Rudyard Kipling: *the Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 2010), pp. 20–21.

And the sneers of the travelled idiots who duly misgovern the land,
And I prayed to the Lord to deliver another one into my hand.

The men who know the sub-continent, according to Kipling, are those who work there in conditions of hardship, often dying young. These are the people with authority who should be listened to by the politicians. Kipling's scorn for Liberal and radical politicians who pronounce on India thus derives from the fact that he thinks they are culpably ignorant. They could listen and pay attention to the people on the ground, but they do not. Similarly, the theosophists are Westerners who presume to re-interpret Eastern religions for their own purposes and popularise ideas which are not only false but even (in the case, for instance, of reincarnation) dangerous if taken literally. Here Kipling differs from those popular authors of his time such as his friend Henry Rider Haggard (1856–1925) who were intrigued by the whole notion of reincarnation and used it as a narrative device.⁵

Reincarnation was a crucial part of the theosophical creed, and the idea of spiritual progress over aeons forms a fundamental plank of Blavatsky's writings. In two of his narratives, 'The Finest Story in the World' (1891) and 'They' (1904), Kipling contests beliefs in the possibility of reincarnation, simultaneously challenging theosophical claims to encompass the whole of human history and offering a way to negotiate a personal family history of madness and loss. In 'The Finest Story in the World' Kipling presents the idea of reincarnation as problematic, one that only really makes sense in fiction. His distrust of too much speculation about after-lives makes sense as a reaction to his sister, Trix's, mental illness. Trix was fascinated by spiritual phenomena and practised automatic writing under the name of Mrs Holland, but was subject to repeated breakdowns, which the family always attributed to her interest in spiritualism and the occult. Kipling's story 'They' contains an oblique comment on Trix's state of mind: the blind woman in 'They' who uses theosophical imagery such as the egg and the special colours is shown not to be able to 'see' after all, and the project of trying to communicate with the dead in the spirit world is a wish that must be resisted. The story gains particular poignancy when we place it in the context of Kipling's grief following the death of his six-year old daughter, Josephine, in 1899.

⁵ Kipling certainly discussed the possibility of reincarnation with Rider Haggard at a later date, but not during this period.

I conclude by assessing Kipling's interest in and attachment to Freemasonry, which Kipling saw as a tolerant creed that — in contrast to theosophy — did not attempt to subsume all religions into a grand schema. Since Blavatsky tried to draw Masonic ideas into her vision of the oneness of all religions, Kipling's traditional Freemasonry is, in part at least, an enacted anti-theosophical stance. Overall, the chapter argues that Kipling's claim to speak authoritatively of Indian religious experience in *Kim* is partly motivated by his long-standing loathing of what he considered to be the presumptive universality and shabby trickery of the theosophists.

Why, out of all the beliefs that the theosophists held, did Kipling take particular exception to their reconfiguring of Buddhism as part of esoteric and secret wisdom? Why, to put the point another way, does he choose a Buddhist priest to be Kim's spiritual guide and teacher on their pilgrimage throughout India? The answer lies in the nineteenth-century perception of Buddhism as an ethical religion which did not depend on belief in supernatural forces but was fully compatible with modern science. This was the Buddhism of Eugène Burnouf and Edwin Arnold, as discussed in the previous chapter. For Burnouf, the most influential Western writer on Buddhism in the nineteenth century, the Buddha was 'a human teacher of religion, or perhaps a philosophy, that preaches ethics and morality without recourse to dogma, ritual, or metaphysics'.⁶ In Kipling's eyes, theosophy complicated and problematized the human figure of the Buddha, turning him from an admirable ethical role-model to 'an incarnation of pure Wisdom' who had 'sworn inviolable secrets as to the Esoteric Doctrines imparted to Him', in Blavatsky's formulation.⁷ Kipling admired Buddhism for its moral code and supposed repudiation of the supernatural, emphases that he thought the theosophists were falsifying and misrepresenting. In this sense Buddhism for him became representative of an admirable ethical system, as for so many in the nineteenth century.⁸ It is this commitment to Buddhism as a moral force that makes Kipling attend so carefully to details of Buddhist belief and practice in *Kim*.

⁶ Donald S. Lopez, Jr, *From Stone to Flesh: a Short History of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 210–11.

⁷ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, 14 vols (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1966), XIV, p. 388.

⁸ See Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 111–13.

Blavatsky: Charlatan or Genius?

Blavatsky was a figure of great controversy in the nineteenth century, as indeed she still is today. Some thought her a genius and immediately fell under her spell; others accused her of plagiarism, fraud, and trickery. She courted controversy initially through her very appearance: famously wearing a scarlet Garibaldian shirt and smoking in public. Olcott was struck by her masculine ‘power, culture, and imperiousness’ at their very first meeting in 1873 in Chittenden, Vermont, site of the supposed materialisation of spirits to the Eddy family. Intrigued by Blavatsky’s unconventional and exotic appearance, Olcott offered her a light for her cigarette: ‘our acquaintance began in smoke, but it stirred up a great and permanent fire’, he wrote at the beginning of his published diary.⁹ The two moved to New York, where they founded the Theosophy Society in 1875 and gathered a small circle of acolytes around them. Controversy followed swiftly following the publication of Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* (1877). The first part, ‘Science’, is devoted to an attack on Hume, Darwin and Huxley for narrowing the notion of science so that it only applies to observable phenomena. Blavatsky argues that there are other laws in the universe accessible to occult wisdom which should be included under the name of science. The second part is an essay in comparative religion, and claims that all religions should be subsumed into an ancient wisdom tradition, a claim that scholars such as Max Müller found implausible and founded on dogma rather than knowledge.¹⁰

Blavatsky was immediately accused of plagiarism and lack of originality, because she used many books on occultism without troubling to acknowledge her sources, while presenting her argument as an original one. There was a furious attack on her for ‘plagiarism in idea, and plagiarism in language’ by the American writer William Emmette Coleman, who carefully traced the origins of some two thousand passages ‘copied from other books without proper credit’.¹¹ Since much of *Isis Unveiled* purports to be a work of synthesis, this criticism may seem unfounded, but

⁹ Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: the Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society*, 6 vols (Adyar: the Theosophical Publishing House, 1954), I, p. 1. Olcott’s diaries are the primary source for the early history of the Society.

¹⁰ See Friedrich Max Müller, ‘Esoteric Buddhism’, *Nineteenth Century*, 33 (1893), 767–88.

¹¹ William Emmette Coleman, ‘The Sources of Madame Blavatsky’s Writings’, in Vsevolod Sergeevich Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), Appendix C, p. 366.

Coleman's attack is symptomatic of the hostility that Blavatsky engendered, a hostility that Kipling and many others shared.

Blavatsky and Olcott also attracted controversy because of their identification with Indian dress and customs when they travelled to India in 1879, a country seen by them as the source of ancient wisdom. They landed in Bombay and immediately set out to court the Indian population, living in the 'Hindu quarter' where 'visitors thronged daily to us in increasing numbers, a packed roomful of Parsi gentlemen with their wives and children being followed, immediately afterward, by a like number of Hindu families'.¹² Unusually for Western visitors, they did not initiate contact with the Anglo-Indians and did not call at Government House. However, A. P. Sinnett, the editor of the *Pioneer*, intrigued by their views, got in touch and invited them to stay at his summer house in Simla, and here they met Lockwood Kipling. Sinnett was well known to Lockwood, who wrote articles for the *Pioneer*, and later to Rudyard, who began working for the *Pioneer* in 1887. Sinnett was motivated by an interest in the occult. In his posthumously published autobiography he writes about his initial interest in theosophy and his subsequent belief that his meeting with Blavatsky and Olcott was planned by the Mahatmas:

Someone had told me about Madame Blavatsky's book *Isis Unveiled* as opening up a new idea in advance of Spiritualism, the actual reality of magic. Then I saw a statement in the Bombay papers that she and Colonel Olcott had arrived in Bombay and I wrote a note about them in the 'Pioneer' assuming that they were spiritualists coming to London in search of a new variety of mediumship. Apropos to this note Colonel Olcott wrote to me. [...] I know now, of course, that the Masters were planning to bring us together.¹³

Nervous of the insular characteristic of Simla society, Sinnett advised Blavatsky and Olcott to treat their visit as a holiday rather than to force their 'heterodox ideas' on the Anglo-Indian community or complain of their 'grievances'.¹⁴ This advice was ignored, because Blavatsky was not the sort of personality to hold back on her views and had come to make new converts.

¹² Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, II, pp. 16, 19.

¹³ Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1986), pp. 15–16. Sinnett left the typescript of this book to the Theosophical Society, Adyar, on his death.

¹⁴ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, II, p. 226. Their main 'grievance' was that they were being watched as possible spies.

In Simla, Blavatsky soon became notorious for her claim to be able to harness the forces of nature to perform ‘phenomena’, or magic tricks, such as reading thoughts, materialising objects, producing sounds which were compared to ‘fairy-bells’, and receiving letters from her spiritual ‘masters’ in Tibet which were precipitated through the air by magical means. The Anglo-Indian community in Simla was polarised by the visit, many being impressed by Blavatsky’s apparent exhibitions of occult power, two of which quickly became famous. On one occasion she located a spare cup and saucer buried in the ground, of the exact pattern of those brought on a picnic by her hostess, though she refused to do the same trick under controlled conditions.¹⁵ On another occasion she found a missing brooch belonging to Mrs Hume, wife of the prominent civil servant Allan Octavian Hume (1829–1912). Hume immediately became a convert.¹⁶ He was not the only one. Olcott’s lecture on ‘Spiritualism and Theosophy’ attracted the largest audience ever gathered together in Simla, according to his own account.¹⁷ A. P. Sinnett became a life-long theosophist and soon became the ‘recipient’ of letters from the Tibetan Masters, known as the Mahatma Letters. Lockwood Kipling, though, was less impressed, calling Blavatsky ‘one of the most interesting and unscrupulous imposters that he had met’, a view recorded in his son’s autobiography.¹⁸ Lockwood saw Blavatsky as a fraud, a charge that was commonly made and frequently treated satirically in the popular literature of the day. Even Sinnett writes of how, ‘At first we were chilled with serious doubt as to whether she was not at least half an impostor’.¹⁹

Blavatsky’s claims to be able to harness occult forces which had their own quasi-scientific laws brought her into immediate conflict with The Society for Psychical Research, which had been set up in 1882 to investigate psychic phenomena

¹⁵ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, II, p. 235.

¹⁶ However Hume became disillusioned with Blavatsky when in 1883 he compared her handwriting with that of the ‘chief mahatma’ Koot Hoomi who was allegedly sending missives from Tibet. The handwriting was identical. See Charles Allen, *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Abacus, 2008), pp. 143–44. Hume later wrote about Blavatsky that she was the most marvellous liar he had ever met, but he excused her on the grounds that she used deception with the honest object of converting people to a higher faith. Edward J. Buck, *Simla Past and Present* (Calcutta: Thatcher, Spink, 1904), p. 122.

¹⁷ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, II, p. 242.

¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: for my Friends Known and Unknown* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 47. Sinnett was replaced as the editor of the *Pioneer* because of his theosophical views.

¹⁹ Sinnett, *Autobiography*, p. 17.

in ‘the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned enquiry which has enabled Science to solve so many problems’.²⁰ The Society sent an investigator, Richard Hodgson, to India to research Blavatsky and in particular her claims to be able to do magic tricks such as conjuring up sounds and finding lost objects. Hodgson based many of his conclusions on the evidence given by Mr and Mrs Coulomb, who had been employed by Blavatsky at the Theosophical Society’s headquarters in Adyar, India, but who had fallen out with the other residents. Emma Coulomb provided apparent documentary evidence that Blavatsky’s ‘phenomena’ were fraudulent:

She showed them [the Trustees] how she and HPB had made a doll together, which they named Christofolo and manipulated on a long bamboo pole in semi-darkness to provide the Master’s alleged apparitions. Emma had also dropped ‘precipitated’ letters on to Theosophical heads from holes in the ceiling, while her husband had made sliding panels and hidden entrances into the shrine-room to facilitate Blavatsky’s comings and goings and make possible the substitution of all the brooches, dishes and other objects that she used in her demonstrations.²¹

Hodgson was convinced by this evidence. The conclusion of his report for the PPR was unequivocal, though it did betray an admiration for Blavatsky and her formidable personality:

For our own part, we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history.²²

The Coulombs’ evidence and Hodgson’s conclusion have been bitterly contested by theosophists ever since the SPR report came out in 1884, but in the end the report, though it convinced some, did not dent the popularity of the new movement.²³ However the publicity given to the Hodgson report and Blavatsky’s move to London gave rise to many satirical attacks on Blavatsky and her claim to be able to produce

²⁰ Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 137.

²¹ Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon: Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993), p. 81.

²² Both quotations from Rick Fields, *How the Swans came to the Lake: a Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p.104.

²³ For a defence of Blavatsky in the face of the Hodgson report, see, for example, Joseph H. Fussell, *Incidents in the History of the Theosophical Movement* (California: Aryan Theosophical Press, 1910); Leslie Price, *Madame Blavatsky Unveiled?* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1986).

‘phenomena’. For instance, the traveller and diplomat Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888) published a series of satires in 1887. In ‘Fashionable Philosophy’ a society gathering is persuaded by a Mr Drygull to listen for the sounds of a tom-tom beating in the Himalayas: they persuade themselves that they can hear the sound, but it turns out to be a servant beating a carpet in the next room.²⁴ A more bizarre example is the pamphlet by Sylvester Tomkyns, Jr., a pseudonym, not known of whom, in response to a ghost story written by Kipling’s friend Walter Besant and published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Tomkyns republished the ghost story along with a burlesque of theosophy and entitled his pamphlet *The Ghost-Mystery at Knotty Ash, Liverpool! Or the Mysterious Midnight Funeral* (1891). Tomkyns provides a learned introduction citing Esoteric Buddhism, Swedenborg, and other approved authorities on the occult and refers to mysteries which ‘defy not alone the Post Office Authorities, but also the handicraft secrets of the Crockery-Ware mender’, unobvious references to the Mahatma letters and Blavatsky’s magic tricks. Tomkyns also includes an ‘interview’ with ‘Solitarius, the Ghost-Seer and Theosophist’ who mentions the Master Tooti Fruhti Fal Lal Lah, who had precipitated a poem to him on cigarette paper from Mount Everest. Solitarius is soon to go to Tibet to commune with Tooti Fruhti, his expenses being defrayed by Colonel Occult and A. P. Linnett, references to Koot Hoomi [one of the Tibetan ‘Masters’], Olcott, and Sinnett.²⁵

Kipling’s story ‘The Sending of Dana Da’ (1888) is thus part of a genre which satirises theosophy as a ridiculous belief practised by impostors. The opening makes its target clear:

Once upon a time, some people in India made a new Heaven and Earth
out of broken teacups, a missing brooch or two, and a hairbrush.²⁶

Blavatsky and her tricks with teacups and brooches in Simla are clearly the reference here. The story continues with more references to theosophical claims:

The Religion never seemed to get much beyond its first manifestations;
though it added an air-line postal service and orchestral effects in order

²⁴ Laurence Oliphant, *Fashionable Philosophy and Other Sketches* (London: Blackwood, 1887).

²⁵ Sylvester Tomkyns, Jr, *The Ghost-Mystery at Knotty Ash, Liverpool! or the Mysterious Midnight Funeral!* (London: Tarstow, Denver, 1891).

²⁶ ‘The Sending of Dana Da’, in Rudyard Kipling, *Soldiers Three and In Black and White* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 144–52 (p. 144). Further references are given in the text.

to keep abreast of the times and choke off competition. (144)

The 'air-line postal service' refers to the Mahatma letters; the 'orchestral effects' are the fairy-bells whose sound Blavatsky could apparently produce at will. 'This religion was too elastic for ordinary use', continues the narrator, before citing a whole list of borrowings from occult and eastern practices, including 'spiritualism, palmistry, fortune-telling by cards, hot chestnuts, double-kernelled nuts, and tallow droppings' (144). The use of bathos in this list introduces a note of contempt, which is continued in the next paragraph where the original 'Old Man of the Mountains' is said to be 'the only authorised Head of the Tea-cup creed', in another obvious allusion to the Mahatma letters (145). The story is thus introduced and framed by overtly satiric references to Blavatsky and her most notorious claims and exploits.

The theme is revenge. Dana Da promises to help an Englishman who wishes to teach a lesson to certain theosophists who object to his apostasy from the creed, in particular one Lone Sahib. Dana Da arranges for 'manifestations' of loathsome looking kittens to appear in Lone Sahib's house. The theosophists are completely taken in and believe that they are supernatural visitations (148). 'After sixteen kittens', a letter comes 'flying through a window — from the Old Man of the Mountains — the Head of all the Creed — explaining the Manifestation in the most beautiful language and soaking up all the credit of it for himself' (150).

This further sardonic reference to the Mahatma letters signals that Dana Da has triumphed. The theosophists are humiliated by such a display of power from one whom they had expelled. At the end of the story Dana Da tells the Englishman how the trick was performed: he has bribed his bearer to supply the kittens from the bazaar. The theosophists are portrayed as stupid and credulous, and the Englishman as ineffectual: he is not clever enough to outwit the fraudulent theosophists on his own but needs the help of Dana Da who, though of uncertain origin, really knows the ways of India.

The story has an extravagant, sarcastic, and bombastic tone. Kipling is clearly mocking the pretensions and actions of Blavatsky and her claims to be able to perform magic tricks and receive occult communications. 'The Sending of Dana Da' readily fits into the category of contemporary attacks on Blavatsky and Olcott, who were frequently portrayed as charlatans. But this raises an important question about

Kipling's attitude. Given that he believed Blavatsky played practical jokes on her credulous followers, why did he not celebrate her as a supreme example of the joker? Kipling enjoyed practical jokes, and many of his stories deal with the outwitting of the credulous, for example, 'His Wedded Wife', 'Pig', and 'Cupid's Arrows' from his first volume of short stories, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888).²⁷

The answer lies in the seriousness with which Kipling approached religious ideas and religious traditions, and his view of the importance of respecting authoritative knowledge. Theosophy attempted to appropriate all religions, especially Buddhism, into its world view, as I have indicated. Kipling's presentation of the lama in *Kim* is sympathetic and knowledgeable, and he makes a real attempt in that novel to engage with the key Buddhist ideas of Nirvana and the bodhisattva, as succeeding chapters will explore. Kipling sees Blavatsky and Olcott as impostors who, even though they 'converted' to Buddhism in Ceylon in 1880, were not truly Buddhists because they wished to construct Buddhism in their own way.²⁸ They have no right to pronounce on Buddhism, in Kipling's eyes. The contempt that he feels for the whole theosophical enterprise explains the ferocity of his attack on it in 'The Sending of Dana Da'.

In the light of this interpretation I take issue with the approach taken by Sandra Kemp, the only critic to have discussed this story at any length.²⁹ Kemp does class the story as 'a satire on the dissemination of theosophy in Simla' in which 'Kipling mocks the eclectic and esoteric nature of the creed' (41). But she goes on to argue that the narrator's attitude is 'harder to place than at first appears' and that

²⁷ Sylvia Pamboukian's very interesting article 'Science, Magic and Fraud in the Short Stories of Rudyard Kipling', *English in Transition, 1880–1920*, 4 (2004), 429–45, examines Kipling's use of new technologies such as the telegraph in his stories about magic and fraud and makes the point that many of the stories probe the nature of gullibility in the modern world. However Pamboukian does not deal with any anti-theosophical agenda on the part of Kipling.

²⁸ Kipling felt contempt for Olcott's attempts to 'unite' Northern and Southern Buddhism, an audacious project roughly comparable to trying to unite Catholic and Protestant Christianity. In 1889, Kipling encountered Olcott in Japan: 'Colonel Olcott is wandering around the country now, telling them that the Buddhist religion needs reformation [...] The two [Buddhism and Theosophy] are built along entirely different lines, and they don't seem to harmonise. It only needs Madame Blavatsky now, cigarette in mouth [...] and the menagerie would be full'. Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1900), I, pp. 450–51.

²⁹ Sandra Kemp, *Kipling's Hidden Narratives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 41–44. Further references are given in the text.

there are ‘contrasting tones and styles within the narrative’ (42). The fact that Lone Sahib reads the letter supposedly from the Mahatmas ‘in five different ways’ indicates that the ‘theosophists are tacitly aware of their participation in a game’. Kemp concludes from this reference to the letter being read in different ways that Kipling is suggesting that ‘you can endow words with meaning if you so choose’ and that the reader is also engaged to unravelling meaning (43). She points to ‘the equivocation in Kipling’s response to the psychic and the supernatural’ as being an important factor in our interpretation of the story (44). However to see an equivocation in Kipling’s handling of theosophical ideas underestimates the savage and bombastic tone, and minimises the fundamental seriousness of his satire. Rather than feeling any ambivalence about the claims of theosophy, Kipling ridicules it as fraudulent and absurd. His lack of ambivalence about the claims of theosophy is further seen when we look at his portrayal of the lama in *Kim*.

The Mahatmas and the Lama

One of the boldest claims made by Blavatsky, and satirised in ‘The Sending of Dana Da’, was that she was privy to occult knowledge through astral communications from Masters, or Mahatmas, in Tibet, and that these Masters were the source of spiritual authority. The most important of the Masters were said to be Koot Hoomi and Master Morya, whom Blavatsky claimed to have met and been instructed by while living in Tibet for seven years.³⁰ A Mahatma is not a supernatural being, but someone of advanced spiritual development, acquired through many reincarnations, according to Blavatsky:

A Mahatma is a personage who, by special training and education, has evolved those higher faculties and has attained that spiritual knowledge which ordinary humanity will acquire after passing through numberless series of reincarnations during the process of cosmic evolution.³¹

³⁰ This claim has no evidence to support it other than Blavatsky’s writings (and the letters from the alleged Mahatmas). There certainly were a few travellers to different parts of Tibet in the later nineteenth century, who left voluminous diaries: see Mary A. Procida, ‘A Tale Begun in Other Days: British Travelers in Tibet in the late Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Social History*, 30 (1996), 185–208. However the difficulties of travelling in Tibet, Blavatsky’s size and lack of fitness which would have made the journey in hostile terrain difficult, and her known predilection for self-fashioning, all suggest that there is no basis to her claim to have lived in Tibet.

³¹ *The Theosophist*, July 1884.

The Mahatmas have Chelas who are their disciples. Occasionally the Mahatmas speak through their Chelas and occasionally they use their Chela's 'magnetism' to send letters. Blavatsky claimed to have received direct inspiration from the Masters in her writing. Olcott, too, claimed to have had visitations from the masters:

I have seen them, not once but numerous times. I have talked to them. I was not entranced or mediumistic, but always in my sober senses. I have corresponded with them, receiving their letters.³²

The most famous letters allegedly sent by the Masters were the so-called Mahatma letters written to A. P. Sinnett. Fascinated by the existence of the Mahatmas, Sinnett asked Blavatsky to put him in touch with one, and the ensuing contact and correspondence are detailed in three important theosophical works, *The Occult World* (1881), *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) and *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. and K. H.* (1923).³³ *The Occult World* contains the first general statement about the existence of the Masters and their importance for the Theosophical Society. The Masters, according to Sinnett, are beings who through a long process of reincarnation have achieved insights and degrees of learning far in advance of mortals living today. They have the ability to dissociate consciousness from the body, so that they can instantly communicate with other minds on earth. They remain in seclusion in the Himalayas because 'they find contact with the coarse heavy currents of ordinary human emotionalism — violent feeling, material grasping, and base ambitions — painful to their sensitive organization'. They transmit their teaching through letters, with Blavatsky as the conduit and Sinnett as the recipient. Theoretically the letters were 'precipitated' by a complex process. The Master did not attend to the actual precipitation himself but 'delegated it to one of his distant chelas, who caught his Master's thought-forms in the Astral Light and set them down by the chemical process which he had been taught to employ'.³⁴

There was an immediate charge of plagiarism against the Mahatmas, just as there had been against Blavatsky. Henry Kiddle (1824–1891), an American Spiritualist, accused the writer of the Mahatma letters of having copied whole

³² Henry Steel Olcott, 'The Himalayan Brothers', *Light*, March 4, 1882, p. 98, <<http://blavatskyarchives.com/olcottandmahatmas.htm>> [accessed 4 November 2013]

³³ The originals of the Mahatma letters are in the British Library.

³⁴ Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *The Mahatmas and their Letters*, pp. 153, 157 <<http://blavatskyarchives.com/kuhnmahatmaletters.htm>> [accessed 30 July 2011]

passages from a lecture of his delivered in New York in 1889 and subsequently published. The Master Koot Hoomi ‘explained’ in a letter to Sinnett that:

the apparent forgery of words and ideas came about through a bit of carelessness on his part in the precipitation of his ideas through a chela. While dictating a letter to the latter, he had caught himself ‘listening in’ on Mr Kiddle’s address being delivered at the moment in America; and as a consequence the chela took down portions of the actual lecture as reflected from the mind of K. H.³⁵

Even faced with such an implausible explanation, Sinnett never doubted the authenticity of the letters, but many did, including A. O. Hume, the most prominent civil servant in Simla, who became disillusioned with Blavatsky. The Hodgson Report dismissed the claims of communication with the Masters as completely fraudulent, backed up by the Coulombs: Mr Coulomb claimed that he had built a sliding panel in the back of the shrine where the Masters deposited their letters’.³⁶ Hodgson in his report for the SPR completely repudiated the idea of communication from the Mahatmas:

All the marvellous narratives put forward as evidence of the existence and occult powers of the Mahatmas are to be explained as due either a) to deliberate deception [...] or b) to spontaneous illusion, or hallucination, or unconscious misrepresentation or invention on the part of the witness.³⁷

Sceptics believed that Blavatsky wrote the letters herself, a claim furiously contested by proponents of theosophy.³⁸ As the theosophist Alvin Boyd Kuhn puts it, in a somewhat circular argument:

To most Theosophists the existence of the Masters and the contents of their teaching form the very corner-stone of their systematic faith. And

³⁵ Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy: a Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Holt, 1930), p. 157.

³⁶ Fields, *Swans*, p. 103.

³⁷ Fields, *Swans*, p. 104.

³⁸ For a meticulous analysis of the style of the Mahatma letters, see Harold Edward Hare and William Loftus Hare, *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936). The authors conclude from their stylistic analysis that Blavatsky wrote the letters herself. The authenticity of the Mahatma letters is still fiercely defended in theosophical literature: see, for example, Virginia Hanson, *Masters and Men: the Human Story of the Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980) for an uncritical account. An early attack on the notion of the Mahatmas was written by Rev. George Patterson, ‘The Collapse of Koot Hoomi’, *Madras Christian College Magazine*, (1884), 199–215.

ultimately they point to the wisdom and spirituality displayed in the Letters themselves as being sufficient vindication of that faith.³⁹

Blavatsky's belief in the Tibetan Mahatmas is an important, and unrecognised, part of the context in which *Kim* was written. The lama is presented by Kipling as the antithesis of the theosophical Mahatmas. Like them, he lives in Tibet, but unlike them, he has left his monastery in Tibet and come on a pilgrimage to the four holy places of Buddhism, the sites of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, death and first sermon. Above all he is on a quest to find the river of the arrow where he believes he will find enlightenment and free himself 'from the Wheel of Things by a broad and open road'.⁴⁰ The 'broad and open road' is a road accessible to all who follow the Dharma, or Buddhist Law. The Lama therefore does not seek to impart esoteric knowledge available only to the few, as was the case of the theosophical Mahatmas. Moreover, he is presented as human, again unlike the Mahatmas who are a special kind of being reincarnated through the ages. He is portrayed as an old man who has 'gentle kindness' (38) and 'quiet dignity' (43). He is 'wise and holy' (43) and is a 'scholar removed from vanity, as a Seeker walking in humility, as an old man, wise and temperate, illumining knowledge with brilliant insight' (213). Kipling is careful to place him in the context of Tibetan Buddhism and introduces specific features of that form of Buddhism, as David Scott explains:

Mention of the Dalai Lama at Lhasa, the 'Old Law' *Nyingma* and the Reformed Law *Gelugpa* schools, the [...] Buddhist 'Wheel of Life' (*bhavachakra*) imagery, the practice of the Lama walking in meditation whilst clicking a rosary bead, Tibetan prayer-wheels, the Lama's recitation of the *Om mane padme hum* ('Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus') mantra, the sacredness of drawing, and the existence of Tibetan devil-dance masks.⁴¹

These specific references give the lama a precise location in time and place, unlike the Mahatmas whose location is only known to the privileged few. His chela (disciple), Kim, is not the recipient of 'precipitated' letters, but someone who cares for the lama and becomes increasingly devoted to him throughout the novel. Kipling's use of letters in the novel makes this point clear. Letters function as a key

³⁹ Boyd Kuhn, *The Mahatmas*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Alan Sandison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9. Further references are given in the text.

⁴¹ David Scott, 'Kipling's Encounters with Buddhism and the Buddhist Orient: "The Twain Shall Meet"?' *Cultural History*, 1 (2012), 36–60 (p. 49).

part of the plot, being used as part of the activities of the Great Game, as well as a way for the lama and Kim to communicate when Kim is at school. They are not 'precipitations' from Tibet, but ordinary missives often mediated through letter-writers, who give a particular slant to the translations they are asked to make. For instance, the letter that the lama writes to Father Victor enclosing money for Kim's education contains a prayer to 'Almighty God' which is a Christian version of the lama's phrase 'to acquire merit'. Kipling writes that the lama would have been 'more annoyed than the priest had he known how the bazar letter-writer had translated his phrase' (106–07). The lama resists any syncretising tendency to 'translate' the key Buddhist idea of acquiring merit into the vocabulary of another religion, and the letter is constructed by the intermediary, the letter-writer, a satirical allusion to Blavatsky's construction of the Mahatma letters. But letters are not the primary form of communication between the lama and Kim. In an implicit repudiation of the authority attached to the Mahatma letters, Kipling presents the development of the personal and spiritual relationship between Kim and the lama as being forged on their travels on the road rather than through 'precipitated' missives.

The lama's spiritual authority is very different from that of the Mahatmas, too. It derives from his attempts to understand the Wheel of Life, the pictorial representation of the causes of suffering and the way of release from suffering that was painted on the outside of nearly every Tibetan Buddhist temple, as discussed in the introduction. This is the only picture ever drawn by the lama, who is presented as a gifted artist:

In clearest, severest outline he had traced the Great Wheel, whose centre is the conjoined Hog, Snake, and Dove (Ignorance, Anger, and Lust), and whose compartments are all the heavens and hells, and all the chances of human life. Men say that the Bodhisat Himself [the historical Buddha] first drew it with grains of rice upon dust, to teach His disciples the cause of things [...] Few can translate the picture-parable [...] Of those who can both draw and expound are but three. (192)

The lama's aim on his search is not, though, just to explain the Wheel to others but to free himself from the emotions of ignorance, anger, and lust that the Wheel portrays. The most important moment of clarity for the lama about the destructive power of these emotions comes in his encounter with the Russian spies, who can be recognised as coded representations of Blavatsky and Olcott.

This idea gains plausibility from the fact that the suspicion that the two were spying for Russia was frequently voiced. In fact, so well-known was this charge that it appeared in a 1888 novel by Augusta de Grasse Stevens, in which a lightly fictionalised Blavatsky is depicted as being in the pay of the Russian government, passing secret communications through letters.⁴² The belief that Blavatsky was a Russian spy was also a charge in the Hodgson report, and Olcott states quite openly in *Old Diary Leaves* that he and Blavatsky had been watched as ‘suspected Russian agents’.⁴³ While in Simla in 1880, where he met Lockwood Kipling, Olcott wrote a formal letter to the Government in India asking that he and Blavatsky not be treated as spies. In the course of the letter he asserts that:

false reports, based upon ignorance or malice, respecting the objects of our Indian Mission, having been made to the Government of India, we were placed under surveillance; but the work was so clumsily done that the attention of the whole country was attracted. (230)

Eventually Olcott got the assurances he wanted and surveillance was called off.

In *Kim* the Russian spies, one Frenchman, one Russian, are portrayed as ignorant and stupid, just like Blavatsky and Olcott, in Kipling’s view. The spies meet Hurree Babu, one of the agents in the Great Game, in the Hills and are completely taken in by his apparent friendliness and helpfulness. Encountering the lama and Kim, the Russian spy asks the lama to explain his drawing of the Wheel of Life, which he wants to buy:

The lama shook his head slowly, and began to fold up the Wheel. The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama’s grip. (242)

The lama, aghast and horrified, puts his hand on his heavy pencease, and the Russian strikes the ‘old man full on the face’, an action to which Kim responds in kind. The lama, though, is horrified at his own impulses to violence. He has understood the teaching of the Wheel, that ‘Evil in itself [...] met evil in me — anger, rage, and a lust to return evil’ (252). The lama realises that he must return to the Plains, that he will not find enlightenment in the Hills, because there ‘Ignorance and Lust met

⁴² Augusta de Grasse Stevens, *Miss Hildreth* (London: Ward and Downey, 1888).

⁴³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, II, p. 228.

Ignorance and Lust upon the road, and they begat Anger' (261). The violence done to the lama, besides being important in the action of the novel, represents the harm done to traditional Buddhism by ignorant attempts to force it into the world-picture of theosophy. The spies are presented as ignorant of the significance of the lama's Wheel of Life, and their attempt to seize the drawing can be seen as a reflection of the theosophical desire to appropriate Buddhism, and thus despoil it, in Kipling's eyes. The Russian spies are depicted as crude and immoral. They do not respect Buddhism because they know nothing about it, and so they fail to understand its ethical teaching.

Buddhism and 'Budhism'

The despoiling of the sacred Buddhist drawing of the Wheel of Life in *Kim* indicates that Kipling was aware of a controversy that developed after the publication of Blavatsky's second major work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) about the differences between Buddhism and her version of the religion, known as 'Budhism'. Theosophy as outlined by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* is an all-embracing and syncretic religion, with its own cosmology and theology derived from many sources, including Hinduism, Gnosticism, mystery religions, neo-Platonism and Western occult religions. Buddhism was included in this new syncretic religion. Blavatsky claimed that the main source for her ideas was the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, a book, then as now, unknown to oriental scholars and almost certainly an invention of Blavatsky's. *The Secret Doctrine* is challenging to read, being verbose, inchoate, and formless. However it must be admitted that it is a formidable work of synthesis, an attempt to harmonise ideas from many different traditions into one grand schema, a veritable key to all mythologies. Blavatsky goes beyond the western occult tradition in that she looks to eastern spirituality as the source of the doctrine that she expounds. As Mark Bevir puts it, she 'incorporated a number of eastern religions into her occultism, and interpreted eastern religions in the light of her occultism'.⁴⁴

Although Blavatsky's writings encouraged a positive view of Indian spirituality in the West, her lack of knowledge of the ancient languages of Sanskrit

⁴⁴ Mark Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62 (1994), 747–67 (p. 764).

and Pali and the cavalier treatment of her sources brought her into conflict with one of the foremost Oriental scholars of the time, Friedrich Max Müller, Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford. The controversy between the theosophists and Müller centred on Blavatsky's re-interpretation of Buddhism as she incorporated it into her grand scheme. She wrote about Buddhism in both *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* in an extraordinarily complicated, not to mention confusing and contradictory, way.⁴⁵ For present purposes, it is better to turn to the book in which she simplifies her ideas, *The Key to Theosophy* (1889). In this work she distinguishes between esoteric and exoteric Buddhism. Esotericism is based upon ideas of secret or hidden knowledge passed only between initiates, whereas exotericism usually refers to the outer or public dimensions of a religion. Blavatsky draws a clear distinction between the two main schools of Buddhism, identifying esoteric Buddhism with Northern or Mahayana Buddhism, and exoteric Buddhism with Southern or Theravada Buddhism. She identifies esoteric Buddhism with ancient wisdom and, recognising that there might be misunderstanding about what she means, christens this form of Buddhism 'Buddhism', distinguishing it from the religion founded by the historical Buddha, Gautama:

The schools of the Northern Buddhist Church, established in those countries to which his [Buddha's] initiated Arhats retired after the Master's death, teach all that is now called Theosophical doctrines, because they form part of the knowledge of the initiates.⁴⁶

Blavatsky's assimilation here of one major school of Buddhism into the ancient Wisdom religion, though it was occasionally accepted by practising Buddhists in the East (often for their own purposes) was completely dismissed by most contemporary scholars. Buddhist modernist reformers, such as Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) in Ceylon, made use of the Theosophy Society for a time but in the end rejected the theosophical interpretation of Buddhism.

Max Müller was scornful of Blavatsky's pretensions to specialist knowledge for a very particular reason: she had no grounding in the ancient languages of Sanskrit and Pali, the languages of the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. Müller wrote

⁴⁵ For a thorough assessment of Blavatsky's views on Buddhism, inaccessible to the non-specialist, see H. J. Spierenburg, *The Buddhism of H. P. Blavatsky* (California: Point Loma, 1991).

⁴⁶ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London: Theosophy Co., 1948), p. 14.

with some authority: he had been a pupil of the great Oriental scholar Burnouf. In turn Müller made many of the Hindu and Buddhist classics available to the English public through his editorship of the fifty-volume series of the *Sacred Books of the East* from 1879-1910, a series in which ten of the canonical works of Buddhism were translated for the first time. Müller is often identified as the founding father of the academic study of religions.⁴⁷

Müller asserted his academic authority in an acrimonious exchange with A. P. Sinnett in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, publishing a long article entitled ‘Indian Fables and Esoteric Buddhism’ in May 1893. At the time Müller was also preparing the fourth of his Gifford Lectures for publication, in which he throws down the gauntlet to modern theosophy, insisting that theosophy as an idea has been ‘greatly misappropriated’ and has nothing to do with occult sciences.⁴⁸ In the *Nineteenth Century* he continues the attack on modern theosophy, pointing out that Blavatsky had no grounding in ancient languages and that the sources of her apparent ‘esoteric’ Buddhism — the mysterious Masters in Tibet — were not available to be cross-examined by scholars. Müller’s conclusion is a ferocious attack on the pretensions of theosophy:

If I were asked what Madame Blavatsky’s Esoteric Buddhism really is, I should say it was Buddhism misunderstood, distorted, caricatured. There is nothing in it beyond what was known already, chiefly from books that are now antiquated. The most ordinary terms are misspelt and misinterpreted.⁴⁹

He insists on the primacy of academic and scholarly endeavour in order to understand Buddhism fully:

We should go to the manuscripts in our libraries, even in the Bodleian, in order to do what all honest Mahatmas have to do, copy the manuscripts, collate them, and translate them.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ For a scholarly assessment of Max Müller and his legacy see Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: a Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). For a sympathetic Indian view see Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: the Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller, P.C.* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974).

⁴⁸ Friedrich Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1893).

⁴⁹ Müller, ‘Esoteric Buddhism’, p. 775. Also quoted in Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Buddhism and Science: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 179.

⁵⁰ Müller, ‘Esoteric Buddhism’, p. 787.

For Müller, as for many scholars in this period, the ancient texts have primacy over actual practice in Buddhist countries. However his dispute with the theosophists does not turn on this point but on whether Buddhism can be assimilated into the ancient and occult wisdom tradition that modern theosophy wished to revive. This is the position that Sinnett takes in his rejoinder to Müller in June 1893. Having given a summary of the basic theosophical belief that there is a spiritual science which subsumes all religions into itself, Sinnett attacks Müller for his short-sightedness in not recognising this fact. Müller's rejoinder in the August issue of the *Nineteenth Century* dismisses the ideas expounded by Sinnett as incomprehensible. It is entirely plausible that Kipling and his father knew of this ill-tempered debate, both because of their acquaintance with Sinnett and because Lockwood Kipling, at least, was familiar with the work of Max Müller.⁵¹

Müller was not the only person to attack the pretensions of theosophy in this way, moreover. A personal acquaintance of the Kiplings, Frederika Macdonald, published an article in the *Fortnightly Review* attacking theosophy, calling it a 'religionette' and a 'little creed' which uses 'in a false sense some Buddhist terms and texts imperfectly committed to memory'.⁵² Macdonald was an author, translator, and literary biographer who by her own account had become interested in Buddhism while at school in Brussels in the 1850s (the same school, as it happens, that Charlotte Brontë attended).⁵³ She also used the correspondence pages of the *Woman's Herald* to attack theosophy and debated its merits with Annie Besant at the South Place Society and St James's Hall.⁵⁴ Over three thousand people attended one of these meetings, an indication of the popularity of the debate between theosophy

⁵¹ According to Charles Allen, Lockwood Kipling knew Max Müller's translation of the Buddhist scripture *The Dhammapada* and passed this on to Rudyard. Allen, *Kipling Sahib*, p. 358.

⁵² Frederika Macdonald, 'Buddhism and Mock Buddhism', *Fortnightly Review*, 37 (1885), 703–16, (p. 708). In 1908 Lockwood Kipling illustrated Macdonald's volume *The Iliad of the East*, and it is possible that she had known him in India, since she was certainly in Allahabad in May 1874 from where she wrote a despatch for the *Examiner* entitled 'Harvest Home in India'. An early edition of *The Iliad of the East* was owned by Rudyard Kipling. (It is now in his daughter's library at Wimpole Hall.)

⁵³ Frederika Macdonald, *The Secret of Charlotte Bronte* (London: Jack, 1914): 'M. Heger made me the present of a book that marked a new epoch in my life, because, before I was fifteen, it put before me in a vivid and amusing way the problem of personality. *Le Voyage autour de ma Chambre* of Xavier de Maistre was my introduction to thoughts and speculations that led me to a later interest in Oriental philosophy, and especially in Buddhism'. (pp. 208–09).

⁵⁴ See the *Woman's Herald*, July 13, 20, 27; August 3, 10, 24, 1893.

and its detractors.⁵⁵ In print Macdonald attacked the claims of theosophy in the following forthright terms:

In dealing with Theosophy we [are] not dealing with a religion at all, but with a system that had grown by somewhat questionable processes out of the dishonest attempt by an ambitious and extraordinarily perverse woman to revive the belief in magic, with the object of establishing her own claim to magical gifts, and to arouse a belief in the existence of a secret and mystical doctrine with the purpose of obtaining power and notoriety as the high priestess of that religion.⁵⁶

Macdonald's charges against Blavatsky of fraud and promulgating a 'secret and mystical' doctrine so that she could be its 'high priestess' help to fashion the notion that there is a 'real' Buddhism which is being traduced by theosophy. This is Kipling's view. In the debate about Buddhism and 'Mock Buddhism', to use Macdonald's term, Kipling is firmly on the side of those who think that theosophy is caricaturing and misrepresenting Buddhism. Such an attempt to delineate 'real Buddhism' in the face of theosophical attempts to appropriate the religion into their total world-picture is an important part both of the Victorian construction of Buddhism and of Kipling's thought-world. Because of his experience of the history and traditions of Buddhism, gained largely at the Lahore Museum, Kipling assumes a position of authority as against those who wanted to appropriate the religion into an inauthentic (in his eyes) hybrid.

Fictions of reincarnation and the fiction of reincarnation

Kipling's critique of theosophical ideas is also to be found in one of his best-known short fictions 'The Finest Story in the World' (1891), which deals with the possibility of previous lives. The tone of the story is far more subtle and allusive than that of 'The Sending of Dana Da'. It touches on the nature of inspiration, the demands of popular taste, and the necessity for the writer to make money, as well as exploring the notion of past lives. 'The Finest Story in the World' can be read both as engaging with existing texts which use the idea of reincarnation and, at the same time, as querying the whole notion of reincarnation itself. It is in this latter sense that

⁵⁵ Arthur H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 389.

⁵⁶ Speech reported in the *Woman's Herald*, July 20 1893 <<http://find.galegroup.com/ukpc/retrieve>> [accessed 25 October 2013]

I read the story as a critique of the theosophical belief that the soul is formed through many previous lives.

Reincarnation was a familiar trope in many best-selling novels of the 1880s and 1890s, particularly so in the works of Rider Haggard, with whom Kipling had a long and close friendship. The best-selling novelist of the day, Marie Corelli, frequently used ideas about reincarnation in her books.⁵⁷ In A. P. Sinnett's novel *Karma* (1891), which Kipling may well have read because of his previous acquaintance with the author in India, we find the idea expressed in the following way:

Re-incarnation must eventually be recognised by men whose open minds desire the truth, as the crown and complement of evolution already recognised in physiology [...] You cannot estimate your position in reference to the occult life aright unless you know something of your previous incarnations.⁵⁸

The notion of the spiritual progression of the reincarnated individual over time forms the core of theosophical thinking. Perhaps surprisingly, given the popularity of the idea in the novels of Haggard and Corelli, Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World' is the only one of his fictions to engage explicitly with this belief.

The tale opens with the familiar device of a frame narrator. The narrator meets a bank clerk called Charlie Mears, who longs to be a writer. On the face of it, Charlie does not appear to have much imagination, but, partly in writing and partly in conversation, he produces powerful accounts of sea voyages in the ancient world made by a Viking adventurer and a Greek galley slave. Charlie gives the narrator fragments of a script which turn out to be a corrupt version of ancient Greek. The narrator becomes convinced that Charlie is remembering past lives and it is these memories which nourish the otherwise unimaginative man's creative capacity. The narrator sees his chance. He can use Charlie's memories to publish an authentic account of the life of a Greek galley-slave and make it into a commercial success in an increasingly busy literary marketplace: 'to me of all men had been given the

⁵⁷ These two novelists and their theosophical/Buddhist ideas are both discussed at length in Franklin, *Lotus*.

⁵⁸ A. P. Sinnett, *Karma* (London: Chapman and Hall, 3rd edition, 1891), pp. 75, 184.

chance to write the most marvellous tale in the world'.⁵⁹ But as Charlie almost involuntarily begins to remember the details of other lives, the narrator starts to fear what will happen if he does use Charlie's memories and publish:

Men would mutilate and garb the story [...] Rival creeds would turn it upside-down till, at last, the western world which clings to the dread of death more closely than the hope of life, would set it aside as an interesting superstition and stampede after some faith so long forgotten that it seemed altogether new (119).

Charlie's memories, in other words, would be destroyed and mangled by new religions such as theosophy. The narrator determines to write down the memories but not publish them and at this point he meets a former acquaintance, the Hindu Grish Chunder, who confirms that Charlie's memories are indeed of previous lives, but warns that these things 'are not allowed' to a Westerner, though they are known to 'his people' (122). This is a clear repudiation of the syncretising project of theosophy: it is not for Westerners to dabble in Eastern ideas such as reincarnation. Chunder functions here as a mouthpiece for Kipling's own ideas, and even more so when he predicts that when Charlie falls in love he will cease to take any interest in the past. This is indeed what happens. The story ends in the following way:

'Now, about that galley-story', I said still more cheerfully, in a pause of the rush of speech [about the girl Charlie has fallen in love with]. Charlie looked up as though he had been hit. 'The galley – what galley? Good heavens, don't joke, man! This is serious! You don't know how serious it is!'

Grish Chunder was right. Charlie had tasted the love of woman that kills remembrance, and the finest story in the world would never be written. (135)

Mary Hamer sees the ending as awkward:

Charlie's gift will evaporate once he comes to feel he's in love with a woman, as though something pristine in him will be killed off, and with it access to what is truly known. It's awkward, a place where the pattern of Kipling's own fantasies — or is it his buried memories? — come poking through.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Finest Story in the World', in Kipling, *Many Inventions* (London: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 95–135 (p. 106). Further references are given in the text.

⁶⁰ Mary Hamer, *Kipling and Dreams*, p. 12 < <http://www.kipling.org.uk/rg.dreams.htm> > [accessed 14 June 2011]

In other words, Hamer suggests that this is a misogynistic ending and harks back to Kipling's traumatic experience as a child in the 'House of Desolation', where he was beaten for telling 'lies', or stories, by Mrs Holloway. It is true that Kipling's memories of his humiliation as a child are never far below the surface, but the ending can be read in other ways than as a revenge on the female for robbing the male of his creative powers. It asserts, rather, the importance of love and the here-and-now over constructions of other worlds and other lives, seductive as these notions may be to our imagination. The tone of the ending of the story is cheerfully pragmatic:

Now I understood why the Lords of Life and Death shut the doors so carefully behind us. It is that we may not remember our first and most beautiful wooings. Were this not so, our world would be without inhabitants in a hundred years. (135)

In his affirmation of the present realities of love, marriage, and family Kipling is attacking the pretensions of theosophy and its claim that we are all in a state of spiritual evolution that spans centuries, if not aeons. Lived experience, Kipling is insisting, has its own worth and validity, and love can be transformative. The title of the story suggests that narratives about reincarnation make good stories, perhaps the 'finest' stories in the world, but the notion of past and future lives is one that makes sense only in fiction.

This interpretation is strengthened if we look at how the story uses a popular novel of the day, Mortimer Collins's 1874 novel *Transmigration*, which is explicitly mentioned in the narrative.⁶¹ *Transmigration* is a curious novel which touches on disparate ideas: rebirth, inter-planetary travel, and the utopian society. The central character, disappointed in love, becomes a recluse and dies. He is then reborn, arrives on Mars, the Red Planet, and explores a new kind of society, but, realizing its limitations, decides to be born again on earth. Because he can remember his previous life, he is a precocious child and young man. Finally he falls in love with the granddaughter of the woman he loved, and she happily reciprocates, in the dim remembrance of having once inhabited the body of her grandmother.

This brief summary makes it clear that the novel is a fairly ludicrous example of the 'karmic romance' genre, in which a love affair is pursued over time. However

⁶¹ Mortimer Collins, *Transmigration*, 3 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1874).

one passage in the novel may well have intrigued Kipling. In volume 3 a new character is introduced, Professor Wrighton, who expounds the doctrine of metempsychosis at length to the protagonist, unaware of that character's past experiences. The Professor makes a curious confession. He claims to have been born a woman but is trying to change into a man. When he has the secret of how to do so he will patent it and make his fortune. The Professor talks all night about 'mesmerism, spiritualism, and other preternatural wonders' but in the morning is revealed to be an escaped lunatic and is brought back to the asylum from which he has escaped.⁶² Is the suggestion here that metempsychosis, or reincarnation, is not to be taken seriously, since it is voiced by a lunatic?

The narrator of 'the Finest Story in the World' gives Charlie the book when he is encouraging him to remember his past life as a Greek galley-slave:

He [Charlie] shivered slightly and protested he could remember no more. I did not press him further, but to satisfy myself that he lay in ignorance of the workings of his own mind, deliberately introduced him to Mortimer Collins' *Transmigration*, and gave him a sketch of the plot before he opened the pages.

'What rot it all is!' he said frankly at the end of an hour. 'I don't understand all his nonsense about the Red Planet Mars and the King, and the rest of it'. (112–13)

This reference, at first sight, seems designed to show Charlie's limitations. He cannot understand the idea of previous lives even in fictional form. However, as I have indicated, there is an ambivalence in Collins's novel about the notion of reincarnation with the introduction of the madman. This suggests that Kipling's reference is more subtle than it at first appears, and that a questioning of reincarnation is actually at the heart of his story.

Kipling probably also knew a novel which was a great popular success in its day, Edwin L. Arnold's *The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the Phoenician*, which was serialised in 1890 in the *Illustrated London News* and published in book form in 1891.⁶³ The author was the son of Edwin Arnold whose poem about Buddhism, *The Light of Asia*, Kipling knew from school. *The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the*

⁶² Collins, *Transmigration*, III, p. 121.

⁶³ Edwin L. Arnold, *The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the Phoenician* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891).

Phoenician, which is still regarded today as one of the classics of the science fiction genre, is the story of Phra, whom we first encounter as a Phoenician merchant in the 1st century BCE. Phra falls in love with a British slave called Blodwen, dies, and is reincarnated first in Norman times, then in the Hundred Years War, and finally in Elizabethan England. All the way through his many adventures Phra remains in love with Blodwen. Finally he realizes that it is only by dying that he can be reunited with her. The novel ends melodramatically with the union of the two characters in death.

Reincarnation is used in *Phra the Phoenician*, again, as a backdrop to a love story over time and as a way to introduce various exotic settings in time and space. J. M. S. Tompkins, who believes that Kipling did know and use the novel, describes the work fairly as a ‘lively, picturesque, cheerful romance’ which uses a ‘fantastical metempsychosis to connect a series of historical scenes’. According to Tompkins, Kipling uses the notion of past lives in his story, but the ‘manifestations’ are ‘trimmed, condensed, intensified’.⁶⁴ In other words, rather than construct a narrative of past lives, Kipling has a more sophisticated treatment of the theme, foregrounding an author-figure who hopes to shape such a narrative and explores the difficulties of such an enterprise. In this way Kipling can raise questions about the difficulty of interpreting the past, the problematic nature of memory, and the fitful nature of the creative impulse. Furthermore — and a point that Tompkins does not touch on — the story is set in the context of the literary marketplace. Charlie hopes to make money by writing about his experiences of past lives, but the story makes clear that such an approach to fiction gives the recovery of memories a higher place than the creative impulse. The way that the narrator attempts to use Charlie’s memories for financial gain shows him to be a charlatan who does not take Charlie or his views seriously, and also makes reference to the current best-selling novels which take reincarnation as a theme. The satire thus seems to be directed at writers who pander to the fashionable preoccupation with theosophical ideas such as reincarnation. In the story the whole notion is the stuff of fiction rather than reality, and implicitly questions a core belief of theosophy.

The use of the narrator in ‘The Finest Story in the World’ indicates a further ambivalence about the idea of reincarnation. The narrator becomes convinced that

⁶⁴ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 226, 227.

Charlie is indeed remembering previous lives when he hears from an expert at the British Museum that words which Charlie has scribbled are a corrupted form of ancient Greek. The narrator reacts with glee at his superior knowledge and the use he can make of it:

He would supply me — here I capered among the dumb gods of Egypt and laughed in their battered faces — with material to make my tale sure — so sure that the world would hail it as an impudent and vamped fiction. And I — I alone would know that it was absolutely and literally true. (284)

It would be a mistake here to identify author and narrator as Hamer does in her article ‘Kipling and Dreams’ and suppose that Kipling identifies with stories of past lives as being ‘absolutely and literally true’.⁶⁵ The narrator’s pleasure in the confirmation of Charlie’s story about a previous life derives from two sources: it will make good fiction and he, the narrator, will be able to make money out of it. Kipling exudes contempt here for the gullibility of the public in their appetite for such stories. More importantly, he raises the notion of the role of fiction in discussions of reincarnation. Blavatsky was notorious for the constant self-fashioning of her image, and Kipling would have heard her stories of her seven year sojourn in Tibet with the Mahatmas, since she boasted of these exploits while in Simla. Kipling’s satire is directed at those who are taken in by tales of past lives. It may be more delicately handled than in ‘The Sending of Dana Da’ but the irony is plain: the narrator will pass off the ‘truth’ as fiction. In truth, the narratives of past lives are fictions which are treated by a gullible public as fact, and used by authors to make money. Although Kipling himself was certainly not averse to making money from his writing, he was wary of any attempts to pander to the popular taste for garbled versions of ancient beliefs.

The introduction of the Bengali Hindu Grish Chunder into the story reinforces this point. Kipling was well aware that reincarnation was a key Hindu belief and his aim in introducing this character into the story is to contrast those who dabble in Eastern ideas, such as the theosophists, with those who sincerely and devoutly hold such a belief, from within an ancient tradition. Grish Chunder is introduced when the narrator is beginning to have doubts about his project to write

⁶⁵ Hamer, ‘Kipling and Dreams’, p. 12.

up Charlie's experiences of past lives. If Charlie were permitted 'full recollection for an hour', thinks the narrator, 'churches and religions would war over it', and, as he looks into the future, 'I saw with sorrow that men would mutilate and garble the story' (293).

The prediction that men will 'mutilate and garble' ideas of reincarnation in the future echoes Max Müller's belief that theosophy, a Westernised religion, has caused Buddhism to be 'misunderstood, distorted and caricatured'. Kipling's target is a religion that wants to appropriate Eastern ideas without understanding them. The use of Grish Chunder in the story emphasises Kipling's belief that reincarnation is an Eastern idea and is more appropriately discussed in India rather than England, because it is a concept alien to the Western metropolitan mind. Again, Kipling presents himself as one who knows about India and its beliefs.

Nevertheless, there is a force and power in the description of Charlie's previous lives in this story which hints that Kipling was intrigued by the notion of reincarnation. The narrator in 'The Finest Story in the World' does accept that Charlie has a memory of previous lives, and Grish Chunder, when he forgets his Westernised self, clearly believes in reincarnation. Where Kipling the author stands in relation to this remains tantalisingly obscure. Making this point, the theosophist Henry Steel Olcott wrote in an early review of 'The Finest Story in the World': 'Whether intentionally or not, he certainly manages to convey the impression that he half believes in it himself'.⁶⁶ Whatever Kipling thought about reincarnation, the seductive nature of the possibility of an after-life certainly caught his imagination, and is the subject matter of one of his finest stories, 'They' (1904). The tone in 'They' is more serious than in the two stories just discussed, and has been seen by most critics as reflecting Kipling's feelings of longing to see his dead daughter, Josephine, once more. However the interrogation of theosophical ideas is still an important part of the story's subtext.

The Theosophical Subtext of 'They'

It is always important to look at the poems that preface Kipling's stories to understand the tales fully, and the verses 'The Return of the Children' do indeed act

⁶⁶ Henry Steel Olcott, *The Theosophist*, October 1891, p. 59.

as a prologue to ‘They’.⁶⁷ In this poem children in Heaven who long to return home are given permission to do so by Mary, mother of Christ, with the full sanction of her son Jesus. As Rowan Williams says, the poem functions as a meditation on Heaven and on life:

He [Kipling] can reflect and reflect at great depths on how certain images of heaven, of fulfilment, and completion, can actually take something away from the reality that is loved and valued in human experience. Children [...] need the warmth, the laughter, the immediacy of a humanity which Kipling assumes disappears in Heaven.⁶⁸

This emphasis on the value of the human experience of love is similar to that expressed in ‘The Finest Story in the World’, when Charlie forgets all about his previous lives when he becomes engaged. The tone of ‘They’ is much more haunting and wistful than the earlier story, though, and the basic theme of the tale is the return of the dead to the living, rather than the notion of reincarnation. The key event in Kipling’s life that is essential for interpreting this story was the death at the age of six of his beloved eldest child Josephine in 1899. Kipling was suffering from pneumonia at the time and was so near death himself that news of her loss had to be kept from him and he could not attend her funeral. Kipling used to ‘see’ Josephine after her death at his house in Rottingdean, the Elms. According to his father:

The house and garden are full of the lost child and poor Rud told his mother how he saw her when a door opened, when a space was vacant at table — coming out of every green dark corner of the garden — radiant and — and heartbreaking.⁶⁹

Kipling himself wrote to Edmonia Hill: ‘Be thankful you never had a child to lose. I thought I knew something of what grief meant till that came to me’.⁷⁰

‘They’ clearly deals with the pain of losing children, but a repudiation of theosophical ideas is an important part of the weave of meaning. At first sight the

⁶⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Return of the Children’ and ‘They’, in *Rudyard Kipling: a Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 256–75. Further references are given in the text.

⁶⁸ Rowan Williams, sermon delivered on 22 January 2006 <<http://www.rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1604/rudyard-kipling-sermon>> [accessed 12 July 2015].

⁶⁹ Letter to Sally Norton, quoted in Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 426.

⁷⁰ 30 July 1899. *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Thomas Pinney, 6 vols (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990–2004), II (1990), p. 376.

story is about the temptation of turning to spiritualism as a way to maintain contact with the dead. The narrator is presented as on a voyage of discovery. He drives through the countryside, loses his way, and finds himself at a stately old house. He sees children playing, but they will not come near him. The lady of the house, Miss Florence, is blind and cannot see the children. The narrator tells her of his own children, one of whom, we infer, has tragically died, and he declares that he has never seen the faces of the dead in dreams.

By chance a few weeks later the narrator finds the house again and talks to the blind woman about dreams and visions while the children watch from the wood. They are interrupted in their conversation by a distraught young woman whose child is mortally ill. The narrator seeks help, finding a doctor, fetching medicines and bringing a nurse. But on his third visit to the house the narrator hears that the ill child has died. He can hear the other children playing, and then his hand is kissed in the way that his own dead daughter always kissed it. Only then does he realize that 'They' are the ghosts of dead children, and can only be seen by those who have lost a child of their own. Now that he knows, he must never go there again.

The story is a strange and rather unsettling one. An obvious interpretation is that Kipling is repudiating the temptation to turn to spiritualism to communicate with his beloved dead child. J. M. S. Tompkins makes the point:

The barrier between the dead and the living is not meant to be passed. Even if the road to Endor is seductively lovely as the approach to the yew-studded lawn [...] even if the dead is very young and much beloved, one must turn one's back on that road and return to the living world where one belongs.⁷¹

Tompkins's comment about the road to Endor refers to Kipling's famous poem 'Endor', written in 1919 after his son John had been killed in 1915. The final stanza reads:

Oh the road to En-dor is the oldest road
And the craziest road of all!
Straight it runs to the Witch's abode,
As it did in the days of Saul,
And nothing has changed of the sorrow in store

⁷¹ Tompkins, *Kipling*, p. 203.

For such as go down to the road to En-dor!⁷²

Kipling is commenting here on the biblical story in which King Saul asks the Witch of Endor to conjure up the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28.7), an action strictly forbidden in the Jewish Law. This transgression was one reason for the death of Saul, according to the biblical narrative. In the poem Kipling uses the biblical narrative to make the point that the attempt to communicate with the dead is a futile act which opens the door to manipulation by the unscrupulous and to immense sorrow for the individual concerned.

Many of Kipling biographers have seen his distrust of spiritualism as in part a reaction to his sister's, Trix's, mental illness. Trix, who was always interested in the occult and the paranormal, had her first breakdown at about the time of Josephine's death. In her youth in India she had experimented with crystal gazing and automatic writing, and when she returned to England from India she became famous in spiritualist circles under her pseudonym Mrs Holland. Trix's interest in the occult is mentioned by her nieces, Betty and Helen MacDonald, writing after her death:

That Aunt Trix had second sight, there is no doubt [...] I have Aunt Trix's crystal ball and her black wooden box [...] in which she kept her fortune telling cards [...] Aunt Trix told us how her spirit used to leave her body at night and travel around.⁷³

It is possible that Kipling is associating mental illness with attempts to make contact with the dead in this story. Towards the end of his life, writing in his autobiography, Kipling notes:

There is a type of mind that dives after what it calls 'psychical experience'. And I am in no way 'psychic' [...] I have seen too much evil and sorrow and wreck of good minds on the road to Endor to take one step along that perilous track.⁷⁴

'They' can be read as a warning against the dangers and seductions of spiritualism, given extra force by Kipling's experience of his sister's mental illness against the background of his own grief for Josephine. The story gains its poignancy because of

⁷² Kipling: *the Complete Verse*, pp. 290–91.

⁷³ Reminiscences of Betty and Helen Macdonald in *Trix: Kipling's Forgotten Sister: previously unpublished poems and prose by Trix Kipling*, biographical introduction and research by Lorna Lee (Peterborough: Pond View, 2004), pp. 113, 117.

⁷⁴ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 161.

its universal theme, the necessity of accepting the death of those who have been greatly loved.⁷⁵

However William Dillingham has a different and intriguing interpretation of the story. He argues that the blind woman should be interpreted as an idealised representation of Trix and her psychic gifts:

It is a tender tribute to Trix through his characterization of Miss Florence, an honest, unselfish, and truly gifted non-professional “sensitive”, such as was his sister. [...] Kipling leaves no doubt as to the genuineness of Miss Florence’s ability to call forth the spirits of dead children. There is no hint in the story of fakery or mental unbalance. [...] By portraying her as sightless, the author is able to project vulnerability and innocence, qualities that separate her from the host of fraudulent mediums and their highly inventive machinations.⁷⁶

This is an intriguing reading. I agree with Dillingham that the role of the blind woman is key in the story, but instead of identifying her with Trix I will consider her portrayal in the light of theosophical ideas. The key passage for this interpretation is one in which the narrator and Miss Florence discuss colours and an ‘Egg’ is ‘seen’ by the blind woman:

Slowly she leaned forward and traced on the rug the figure of the Egg itself. ‘I see them so’, she said, pointing with a grass stem, ‘white, green, yellow, red, purple, and when people are angry or bad, black across the red — as you were just now’.

‘Who told you anything about it — in the beginning?’ I demanded.

‘About the colours? No one. I used to know what colours were when I was little — in table-covers and curtains and carpets, you see — because some colours hurt me and some made me happy. People told me; and when I got older that was how I saw people’. Again she traced the outline of the Egg which is given to very few of us to see. (265)

The significance of the blind woman seeing colours and tracing the outline of an egg has, on the whole, baffled critics. The colours have been linked to theories that the blind dream in colour; Daniel Karlin believes that the egg may refer to the ‘Mundane

⁷⁵ I am not arguing that ‘They’ contains Kipling’s only response to spiritualism. ‘The Gardener’ (1925) and ‘The Madonna of the Trenches’ (1924) are two stories that deal with spiritualism but have no theosophical slant.

⁷⁶ William B. Dillingham, ‘Kipling, Spiritualism, Bereavement, Self-Revelation, and “They”’, *English Literature in Transition*, 45 (2002), 402–25 (p. 408).

Egg', the symbol of the world in Orphic religious mysticism.⁷⁷ Peter Havholm, on the other hand, thinks that the references are there to distract the reader:

The 'Egg' and the woman's ability to 'see' the colors in the narrator's soul work like her blindness to deflect attention from what one later realizes has been the third line of hints: that people do not come to the house uninvited.⁷⁸

Dillingham substantiates his point that Miss Florence is presented sympathetically by stressing that the narrator too can 'see' the outline of the egg and so shares her psychic experiences. The Egg represents the optic thalamus 'located in the human brain but in the clairvoyant developed far beyond the ordinary', a key belief of spiritualism. Thus the narrator 'understands precisely what she is drawing just as he understands what she told him about colors. He is one of the "very few"'.⁷⁹

In fact, though, the story reads much more like a journey of discovery and a search for acceptance than one in which the narrator's psychic powers give him knowledge of the situation from the outset. In fact, none of the interpretations proposed by critics for the introduction of the egg and the colours is convincing. Kipling himself wrote about the meaning of the story in an undated letter to Dr Vaughan Bateson:

It was wrong for the man to return to the house because he had really lost his child and it was not his business to continue dabbling among the shadows evoked by the blind woman. But the whole tale is rather difficult to disentangle and I think it is susceptible of several interpretations according as the reader has or has not undergone certain experiences.⁸⁰

The letter does not throw much light on the interpretation of the story but it does suggest that the narrator should not be identified with the blind woman and her apparent psychic gifts. But if these elements are seen to refer to theosophical ideas a critique emerges that is more subtle and allusive than in 'The Sending of Dana Da' or 'The Finest Story in the World', coloured, we might say, by Kipling's own heightened emotional responsiveness. Different colours and the egg as a mystical

⁷⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ed. by Karlin, p. 609.

⁷⁸ Peter Havholm, *Politics and Awe in Rudyard Kipling's Fiction* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), p. 152.

⁷⁹ Dillingham, 'Spiritualism', p. 413.

⁸⁰ Rudyard Kipling, undated letter to Dr Vaughan Bateson, quoted in *The Readers' Guide to Rudyard Kipling's Work*, 7 vols, edited and introduced by R.E. Harbord (privately printed for the Kipling Society: 1965/6), IV, p. 1926.

symbol are important notions in theosophical thinking. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* discusses the egg as a universal symbol:

The Egg was incorporated as a sacred sign in the cosmogony of every people of the Earth, and was revered both on account of its form and its inner mystery. From the earliest mental conceptions of man, it was known as that which represented the origin and secret of being.⁸¹

In theosophical thinking, the egg is defined as the source of the human aura, the ‘seat of all the monadic, spiritual, intellectual, mental, passionate, and vital energies and faculties of the human septiform conclusion’.⁸² The aura of the human being is associated with colours, a very important theosophical belief that was adopted by some of the most prominent painters of the early twentieth century, such as Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian.⁸³ Annie Besant, who became a prominent theosophical leader following the death of Blavatsky, associates human emotions with colours:

Changes in consciousness are accompanied with vibrations in astral matter, and as astral matter is fine and very rapid in its vibratory motions, the vibrations are visible to astral sight as colours.

The passion of anger causes vibrations that yield a flash of scarlet, while a feeling or devotion of love suffuses the astral body with a blue or rosy hue. Each feeling has its appropriate colour, because each is accompanied by its own invariable set of variations.⁸⁴

Thus the Egg and colours of the story indicate that the blind woman has theosophical beliefs, and the reference to the Egg ‘which is given to a very few of us to see’ can plausibly be interpreted as a reference to theosophy’s gnostic belief, that knowledge is only available to the few (480). It is more than likely that Trix, with her interest in the occult and automatic writing, was also intrigued by theosophy. If so, I agree with Dillingham that the blind woman is a reference to Trix, but reach the opposite conclusion, that Kipling is repudiating such beliefs, though obliquely, perhaps out of a reluctance to criticise his sister’s beliefs openly. Kipling creates a distance between the narrator and the blind woman. She is in thrall to theosophical ideas about other

⁸¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: the Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols, (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1880) I, p. 313.

⁸² G. de Purucker, *An Occult Glossary* (1933), p. 14

<<http://www.thesociety.org/pasdena/ocglos/og-a.htm>> [accessed 22 January 2014]

⁸³ Kathleen Hall, ‘Theosophy and the Emergence of Modern Abstract Art’, *Quest*, 90 (2002) <<http://www.theosophical.org>> [accessed 18 October 2016].

⁸⁴ Annie Besant, *Theosophy*, p. 7 < <http://www.anandgholap.net/Theosophy-AB.htm>> [accessed 12 January 2015].

worlds: she calls the children back from the dead on each occasion that the narrator meets her and seems to have a strong emotional need to do so:

‘They are really fond of me. It’s the only thing that makes life worth living — when they’re fond of you, isn’t it? I daren’t think what the place would be without them’. (260)

‘They come and stay with me because I love them, you see...I — I haven’t any of my own. I never married’. (264)

When the narrator finally realizes that it is the ghosts of dead children that the blind woman has summoned she expresses remorse:

‘I have no right, you know — no other right. I have neither borne nor lost — neither borne nor lost! ... It was because I loved them so...They came because I loved them — because I needed them. I — I must have made them come. Was that wrong, think you? ... Don’t think me a wretch to whine about myself like this, but I’m all in the dark, you know, and *you* can see’. (274)

The narrator can see a truth that the blind woman cannot acknowledge, namely that he must leave the house and never come again. The story ends with his sitting by the fire, hearing ‘the sound of her feet [the blind woman’s] die out along the gallery above’ (275). She remains in the house, in the world of the dead, whereas the narrator must leave. He must never again see the ghosts of the dead children. The blind woman, by contrast, cannot free herself from this world. She has a strong emotional need to call the children back because of her childlessness. (That the blind woman in part represents Trix is given support by this detail, because Trix was unwillingly childless.) The use of theosophical concepts in this story gives it an added resonance beyond the obvious pathos of the central situation. Theosophy’s preoccupation with esoteric knowledge and reincarnation is gently, but firmly, criticised. If, as I suggest, the blind woman is to be identified in part with Kipling’s sister Trix, then the narrative repudiates Trix’s preoccupations and beliefs.

Lisa Lewis points out that there are over eighty references to light or shade and over fifty references to seeing in this story:

The man sees the children, the children see the car, the blind woman who owns the magic house can ‘see the naked soul’, an intrusive tenant

farmer begs to 'see' her 'man-to-man like', and in the end she says 'Oh, I see', as she understands why the narrator can never return.⁸⁵

This dense repetition makes an obvious association with Trix, who believed she had inherited her mother's gift of second sight. In a letter received by the *Kipling Journal* in 1945, she refers to the fact that she can now talk openly of 'The Sight', as she calls it, because her husband and brother are dead: 'they loathed any reference to it'. She also relates in the same letter an experience of being in contact with a dead child.⁸⁶ In light of this comment it is significant that Miss Florence is blind. She cannot truly understand the significance of life and death because she is misled by her cosmological beliefs about colours, auras, and the significance of the egg. She longs for the children to return, but has to accept at the end of the story that the dead are not reincarnated and do not return to earth.

Kipling's treatment of theosophical ideas becomes increasingly nuanced in these three stories. He has intense contempt for the fraudulent nature of Blavatsky's 'tricks', and he dislikes the theory that spiritual knowledge is available only to the privileged few. Though intrigued by the notion of reincarnation, he thinks it is best confined to stories. However 'They' shows a quite different side to his interest in theosophical ideas. The blind woman and her theosophical beliefs are treated with compassion and a degree of understanding that there is an aspect of theosophy that is trying to make sense of the great mysteries of life and death, rawly intense as these were following Kipling's loss of his beloved daughter. Nevertheless he ultimately repudiates theosophical claims. The theosophists are fraudsters: they are dabbling in ideas which are seductive but dangerous, such as reincarnation and the occult, they claim to an authority in religious matters which has no basis in knowledge and they promote an esoteric and secret religion which undermines the purity of Buddhism's ethical teaching. They claim to speak for India and Indian religion but have no true understanding of Indian culture. It is Kipling's firm belief that he has authoritative knowledge about India and Indian religions and that such knowledge gives him the right to judge the pretensions of theosophy.

⁸⁵ Lisa Lewis, 'Seeing Things: Repetitions and Images in "They"', *Kipling Journal*, 312 (2004), 43–46.

⁸⁶ Alice Fleming, 'Some Interesting Experiences in Psychometry', *Kipling Journal*, 75 (1945), 15–16.

Kipling, Freemasonry, Theosophy and Buddhism

A question remains, though. Kipling was famously highly attracted to Freemasonry, another creed that relies on secret and arcane knowledge. Why is this so, when he disliked the esoteric secrecy of theosophy? Kipling was an active Freemason in his youth and *Kim* is concerned in part with Kim's search for his Masonic identity, while many of Kipling's other writings deal with the ideals and practice of Freemasonry. How, then, does he distinguish the two beliefs? In order to answer this question we must determine, as far as possible, what Freemasonry meant to Kipling. Freemasonry at least superficially appears to have resemblances to theosophy but there are key differences which explain why Kipling embraced Masonic ideals but repudiated theosophy.

Blavatsky believed that all religions were fundamentally one, that theosophy was not 'a Religion' but religion itself. She defines religion as that which 'binds not only *all* MEN, but also *all* BEINGS and all *things* in the entire Universe into one grand whole' (italics and capitals in original).⁸⁷ All religions, in her view, spring from the original Wisdom Religion, the perennial philosophy that is to be found in many different cultures and goes back to ancient times. There are times when Kipling writes in sympathy with this point of view, notably in the preface to his volume of stories *Life's Handicap* (1891). The narrator is explaining the provenance of the tales that he has collected, and describes to the reader a monastery called Chubara built by a pious Hindu called Dhunni Bhagat:

The wandering mendicants, charm-sellers, and holy vagabonds for a hundred miles around used to make Chubara their place of call and rest. Mahomedan, Sikh, and Hindu mixed equally under the trees. They were old men, and when man has come to the turnstiles of Night all the creeds in the world seem to him wonderfully alike and colourless.⁸⁸

However this vision of a resting place for all religious traditions is not in fact the theosophical belief in the unity of all religions, but rather a vision of tolerance between the different faiths, the vision that we see portrayed in *Kim*. Whether Hindu, Jain, Sikh or Muslim, the Indian people are presented as living happily together. They all have their own traditions but they do not seek to proselytise or impose them

⁸⁷ Helena Blavatsky, 'Is Theosophy a Religion?', *Lucifer*, 3 (1888), p. 178.

⁸⁸ Rudyard Kipling, 'Preface', *Life's Handicap*, p. vii.

on one another. The lama, too, is presented as kindly and tolerant. However, though he respects other religions, he is above all a devout Buddhist pilgrim who never deviates from his search for enlightenment. Mahbub Ali, the Muslim, presents the view to Kim that 'Faiths are like the horses. Each has merit in its own country'. Kim replies, 'But my lama said altogether a different thing' (143–44). In other words, the lama is rejecting the relativism of Mahbub Ali's position. For Kipling, respect for other religions is not the same as the assimilation of all religions into one.

James Anderson, one of the earliest writers about Freemasonry, claimed in *The Constitutions of Freemasonry* (1723) that Masonry is both universal and coeval with the human race.⁸⁹ Freemasonry thus shared with theosophy a fascination with occult religions and mystery religions of the past, including Eastern religions as they became gradually known during the eighteenth century. While not as avowedly anti-Christian as theosophy, Freemasonry came to insist less and less on the primacy of Christianity: it was more 'universalist and inclusive than Christianity could ever be'.⁹⁰ Indeed, Blavatsky herself saw links between theosophy and Freemasonry with its claim to preserve and transmit mystical truths. She explicitly referred to the Theosophical Society as 'esoteric Masonry' and argued that most Masons ignored the mystical nature of their Craft. Theosophy and Freemasonry were very much intertwined in the early days of the former. Henry Steel Olcott was a Mason, as was Charles Leadbetter. Annie Besant was an enthusiastic supporter of Co-Masonry, a variant of Masonry which allowed women members, and in 1903 introduced it to India. Freemasons in India, at least after 1843, opened their Lodges to Indians, just as Theosophical Society membership was open to Westerners and Asians alike.⁹¹

It was this multi-racial inclusiveness that Kipling appreciated when he joined a Lodge in Lahore in 1886.⁹² Masonic Lodge Hope and Perseverance no. 782 was

⁸⁹ Vahid Fozdar, "'That Grand Primeval and Fundamental Religion': The Transformation of Freemasonry into a British Imperial Cult", *Journal of World History*, 22 (2011), 493–525 (p. 500).

⁹⁰ Fozdar, 'Freemasonry', p. 503.

⁹¹ The first Masonic lodge in India was established in Calcutta in 1729. Fozdar, 'Freemasonry', p. 503.

⁹² The information about Kipling and Freemasonry is based on Emanul Karim, 'Rudyard Kipling and Lodge Hope and Perseverance', *Kipling Journal*, 189 (1974), 4–12.

racially and religiously diverse.⁹³ There were five Masonic lodges in Lahore; Lodge Hope and Perseverance had been founded on December 27, 1858, the year after the Sepoy Mutiny, with one of its specific aims to foster ‘the bonds of Brotherly Love’. In order to encourage Indian participation in Lodge Hope and Perseverance, the site for its permanent building was selected in the old Anarkali section of Lahore where the Indians resided, away from the exclusive Punjab Club, a club where the young Kipling felt very uncomfortable at times.⁹⁴

Although Kipling was technically under age to be a Mason, he progressed in the Lodge, becoming its secretary and advancing, in December 1886, to the third degree of Master Mason, an unusually quick elevation. He attended meetings assiduously and helped to improve the interior decorations of the Masonic Hall. Two papers to the Lodge members, one on the ‘Origins of the Craft’ and one entitled ‘Some Remarks on Popular Views of Freemasonry’, were presented to the Lodge members. He was also Charity Steward for one year, and would have found out about arrangements for orphans of Masonic fathers, information that he subsequently used in *Kim*.⁹⁵ His zeal and industry on behalf of the Lodge were noted when he left in 1887 to go to Allahabad. A member, J. J. Davies, is reported as paying Kipling the following tribute:

Those of us who have watched his conduct since his situation feel sure that he has before him a successful Masonic career, for the thoroughness with which he conducted his duties was prompted by a lively interest in his work and by a keen desire for a deeper insight into the hidden truths of Masonry.

In reply Kipling said he would always remember the friendships he had formed at the Lodge which would leave a lasting impression on his memory. Indeed, he kept up a connection with his ‘Mother-Lodge’, in 1929 presenting to it a Gavel composed of stone from the quarries which were used for the building of King Solomon’s Temple.⁹⁶

⁹³ At the time of Kipling’s initiation the Lodge had about twenty five members. The Punjab state at the time had about twenty Lodges with an average of thirty members each.

⁹⁴ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ See Richard Jaffa, *Man and Mason-Rudyard Kipling* (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2011), p. 69.

⁹⁶ Jaffa, *Man and Mason*, p. 73.

When Kipling was transferred to Allahabad he joined the Lodge of Independence with Philanthropy no. 391 on April 17, 1888.⁹⁷ Again the Lodge was 'mixed' with a substantial proportion of non-European members. A year later he began his travels with the Hill family before he arrived in England, and even on his travels he recorded seeing a Masonic Lodge in Penang:

I ran away to the outskirts of the town, and saw a windowless house that carried the Square and the Compass in gold and teak-wood above the door. I took heart at meeting these familiar things again, and knowing that where they were was good fellowship and much charity, in spite of all the secret societies in the world. Penang is to be congratulated on one of the prettiest little Lodges in the East.⁹⁸

Thereafter he does not seem to have been an active member of any Lodge, though he did submit an application form to the Societas Rosicruciana in July 1909, a Christian society open to Master Masons 'of high moral character' who were 'capable of understanding the revelations of philosophy, theosophy and science'.⁹⁹ No details are known of his further involvement with Rosicrucians. It is known, though, that Kipling was involved with the consecration of a new Masonic Lodge at St Omer in January 1922. The Lodge was given the name 'The Builders of the Silent Cities', and its aim was to construct resting-places for the British dead of the Great War. A similar Lodge was consecrated in London in December 1927 with Kipling listed as one of its founders, but there is no evidence that he was at the consecration or ever attended the Lodge. To all intents and purposes, Kipling was not active in the Masonic movement after he left India.

In Kipling's autobiography he recalled what he especially valued about his 'Mother-Lodge' in Lahore. He liked the religious and ethnic diversity, which were not of course to be found in the Punjab Club, restricted as it was to Anglo-Indians. In the Lodge:

I met Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of the Araya and Brahmo Samaj [Hindu reform movements], and a Jew tyler [guard] who was priest and butcher to his little community in the city. So yet another world opened to me which I needed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ He resigned from the Allahabad Lodge on 31 December 1895.

⁹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, 1, p. 249.

⁹⁹ Lycett, *Kipling*, p. 520.

¹⁰⁰ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 43.

The mention of ‘another world’ refers not only to Masonic ritual but also to a more multi-racial environment than young Englishmen at the time could normally hope to encounter. In a letter to *The Times* in 1925 Kipling also remembered meeting people of different faiths at the Lodge:

I was entered by a member of the Brahmo Somaj (a Hindu), passed by a Mahomedan, and raised by an Englishman. Our Tyler was an Indian Jew. We met, of course, on the level, and the only difference that anyone would notice was that at our banquets some of the Brethren, who were debarred by caste rules from eating food not ceremonially prepared, sat over empty plates. I had the good fortune to be able to arrange a series of informal lectures by Brethren of various faiths, on the baptismal ceremonies of their religions.¹⁰¹

He celebrated this religious diversity in ‘The Mother Lodge’ (1896), a poem in which the speaker, a non-commissioned officer, reminisces fondly about his own multiracial lodge and the discussions on religion which lasted far into the night, when ‘Man on man got talkin’/Of the God e’ knew the best’ and, as they rode home, each man would be thinking about the different faiths he had encountered: ‘Mo’ammed, God, an’ Shiva/Changin’ pickets in our ‘ead’.¹⁰² In the Lodge, as Kipling presents it, there are no class, religious or racial distinctions, whereas:

Outside — “Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!”
Inside — “Brother”, an’ it doesn’t do no’arm.
We met upon the Level an’ we parted on the Square,
An’ I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there! (356)

As Fozdar says, in this poem:

Kipling presents Freemasonry as a ‘bridging religion’, where the religions of the empire can be viewed synoptically and as operating on a level playing field [...] The ambivalence and ambiguity in Masonic circles towards Christianity permitted an acceptance of the truth claims of other religions and even fostered a syncretic tendency.¹⁰³

The importance of Freemasonry for Kipling can be seen in the fact that his writings are full of allusions to Masonic ideas and imagery, probably far more than are accessible to the non-Masonic reader. To take some obvious examples, in ‘The Man

¹⁰¹ *The Times*, January 16 1925, p. 10 <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw>> [accessed 16 January 2014]

¹⁰² ‘The Mother-Lodge’ in *Kipling: the Complete Verse*, pp. 354–56 (p. 356). Further references are given in the text.

¹⁰³ Fozdar, ‘Freemasonry’, p. 516.

who would be King' (1895) the protagonists are Freemasons and unconsciously burlesque the legendary early history of Freemasonry by declaring themselves kings. The story 'The Rout of the White Hussars' (1888) ends with a Masonic reference to a skeleton and a coffin, which are a form of *memento mori* used in Masonic ritual. In addition to the poem 'The Mother Lodge', Kipling makes reference to Freemasonry explicitly in the poems 'My New-Cut Ashlar' (1890), in which the speaker dedicates himself to his craft and prays that his work may be found worthy, and 'The Widow at Windsor' (1892), in which the British Empire is compared to a Masonic Lodge that stretches over the world.¹⁰⁴ The image of the 'sons o' the Widow' in this poem is a metaphor for the Empire as an extended family and Victoria as the symbol of imperial motherhood. This overt reference veils a Masonic one, however. The phrase 'sons o' the Widow' was 'commonly used in lodge-circles to identify Freemasons as followers of Hiram Abif, himself a widow's son. Undoubtedly, this usage would be instantly intelligible to any Freemason as a veiled reference to the legendary founder of the craft'.¹⁰⁵ So the ideals of Freemasonry and the ideals of Empire seem very closely associated in Kipling's mind.

However, in *Kim*, Masonic ideas and imagery are only important in the first half of the novel, before Kim travels with the lama. The child's legacy from his father:

consisted of three papers — one he called his *ne varietur* because those words were written below his signature thereon, and another his clearance-certificate'. The third was Kim's birth-certificate. (1–2)

Kim discovers that his father was a Mason when one night while travelling with the lama he stumbles across a military Lodge, an advance party of his father's old regiment. He recognises the regimental flags, the red bull on a green ground, which his father had described to him. Bennett, who is Secretary of the Regimental Lodge, recognizes the *ne varietur* and realises that Kim is the son of a former soldier of the Regiment. Bennett insists that Kim must go to the Masonic Orphanage, but in the end the lama offers money for Kim to go to the best school in India, St Xavier's in Partibus in Lucknow. When Kim leaves school he rejoins the lama in search of the river of the arrow and enlightenment. There are no references in the second half of

¹⁰⁴ Kipling: *the Complete Verse*, pp. 411, 329–30.

¹⁰⁵ Marie Roberts, *British Poets and Secret Societies* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 108.

the novel to Kim as a future Mason, because the focus shifts to Kim's relationship with the lama as beloved chela, suggesting that Freemasonry is a first step along the road of spiritual enlightenment and fully compatible with adopting Buddhist ideals and values.

Many critics and biographers have tried to account for the appeal of Freemasonry to Kipling. Andrew Lycett has perhaps the most judicious assessment:

He [Kipling] never mocked the movement's rituals as he did governments or civil servants [...] Masonry, with its ethical and metaphysical elements, provided the nearest equivalent to a coherent belief system for a young man who, for all his knowingness, was still floundering to make sense of India's mass of conflicting creeds. He himself was not religious in a formal sense [...] But he was fascinated by the way religions sought to explain the more complicated issues of human existence [...] To ground himself he needed a philosophy with an intellectually satisfying explanation of the world and its mysteries. Freemasonry provided a structure which allowed him to dart among different faiths.¹⁰⁶

In addition we can add that the 'masculine self-sufficiency' of Freemasonry, as Charles Carrington calls it, appealed greatly to Kipling, who always enjoyed male company.¹⁰⁷

We can now answer the question posed at the beginning of this section: why, when Freemasonry seems to have a number of elements in common with theosophy, did Kipling embrace the one practice and have such ambivalent, and often hostile, feelings about the other? Any answer must be speculative. It seems that Kipling valued the emphasis on craft and the importance of work in Freemasonry, its use of symbol, ritual, and allegory, its emphasis on charity and good works, and above all its acceptance of all religious traditions. Any sacred book of any religion could be used in Masonic rituals. Indeed, James Anderson, in a classic text of Freemasonry published in 1738, wrote that Masons must:

leave their particular opinions to themselves; [and be] *good men and true*, or men of honour and honesty, by whatever denominations of persuasions they may be distinguished.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Lycett, *Kipling*, pp. 176–77.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 543.

A modern writer on Freemasonry puts this point as follows:

It [Freemasonry] distances itself from formal religion [...] [It] has as its basis the encouragement of brotherly love, charity and truth. It requires a belief in a deity, but does not belong to any specific religion. It is a meeting ground for men of all faiths.¹⁰⁹

The quest, rather than allegiance to a particular religion, is what is important. This is why Kim can be both the son of a Mason (and someone who will no doubt be inducted into Freemasonry by Creighton when he is an adult) and a willing participant in the lama's quest. Theosophy sought to subsume all religions into one, the ancient Wisdom tradition, and re-interpreted Buddhism as an esoteric religion, as I have shown. Freemasonry, as Kipling interpreted it, respects all religions as aids to the individual's quest for meaning. Thus there is no conflict between Kim the future Mason and Kim the chela of a Tibetan lama, since Kim and the lama are both engaged in a quest for meaning.

Kipling's repudiation of the theosophists and their religious ideas forms an important motivation for the writing of *Kim*. At first, in common with many Anglo-Indians who had met Blavatsky, he poured scorn on her pretences to have magical powers, seeing them simply as fraudulent. Back in England he satirised the vogue for stories of reincarnation in his tale 'The Finest Story in the World'. His most serious objections to theosophy come in 'They', where he condemns attempts to dabble in the supernatural, and *Kim*, where the lama is the antithesis of one of Blavatsky's 'Masters', because he shows that the Buddhist Way is open to all. In the contested debate about religious authority, Kipling sides with the scholar Max Müller in his judgement that the theosophists' interpretation of Buddhism is 'misunderstood, distorted, caricatured'. The theosophists' appropriation of religions into their occult wisdom and their fascination with other lives, astral forces, and magic, seems to Kipling a betrayal of the true authentic spirit of the Buddhist religion which, for him, focuses on simple kindness and love for all. Reaching after arcane knowledge or trying to harness forces over which we have no control is for Kipling a route to breakdown and mental instability. Instead, what we must value is the here and now and the experience of love, a state which Charlie joyfully embraces when he becomes engaged and which the narrator of 'They' has to learn, much more

¹⁰⁸ James Anderson, *The Constitution of the Freemasons* (London: Payne, 1738), p. 50. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁹ Jaffa, *Man and Mason*, pp. 225, 228.

painfully. Kipling's supreme expression of the value of love in human relationships comes in *Kim*, and, as I now explore, Buddhist ideas, undistorted, uncaricatured, are the means by which he can express this value. Buddhist concepts provide a way for Kipling to examine ideas about the self and identity, about faith and discipleship, which owe nothing to the evangelical religion that he had repudiated, and enabled his imagination to construct characters for whom Buddhism had supreme value.

Chapter 3

Who is Kim?

Surviving evangelical Christianity and ‘all its terrors’

Kipling’s childhood miseries in Southsea, ‘an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical’, where he was ‘introduced to [Hell] in all its terrors’, perennially haunted his imagination, and led to some of his most powerful verse and prose.¹ This chapter examines Kipling’s anti-evangelical writings and the way that Buddhism enabled him to envisage a quite different kind of religion, one that was loving and healing instead of harsh and destructive. The boy Kim can be seen as an alter ego of Kipling himself, and in the presentation of Kim’s musings about his identity Kipling is able to overcome the miseries of his past by valorising the importance of active compassion in human relationships. Fiction allows Kipling to imagine another past and an experience of religion far removed from the evangelical terrors that he experienced at Southsea.

I begin with one of the most powerful of Kipling’s short stories, ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’ (1888), a thinly-disguised account of the experiences that he and his sister had in the house of the Holloways.² The narrative concerns two small children, called Punch and Judy, who are left with foster-parents in Southsea. The boy Punch is badly treated by their foster-mother, a rigidly fundamentalist Christian who sees the boy as in need of corrective discipline. ‘Aunty Rosa’, a portrait of Mrs Holloway, is angry with Punch when he ‘welded the story of the Creation on to what he could recollect of his Indian fairy tales’ and threatens him with eternal punishment, so that Punch ‘learned to know the Lord as the only thing in the world more awful than Aunty Rosa’.³ Prayer is used as a form of coercion and punishment. Punch’s constant questioning about what he reads is interpreted as showing off, and he is branded a liar by Aunty Rosa and her abusive son Harry, who wakes Punch in the night and demands that he pray ‘for a new heart’ (102). Fear of hell is instilled into

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: for my Friends Known and Unknown* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 10.

² First published in *Week’s News*, Allahabad, 21 December 1888.

³ ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’, in *Rudyard Kipling: a Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 90–113 (p. 97). Further references are given in the text.

him: ‘all the blinding horrors of Hell were revealed to Punch with such store of imagery as Aunt Rosa’s narrow mind possessed’ (101).

Kipling biographers have sometimes felt that he exaggerated his childhood miseries in this story, pointing to the fact that Kipling himself said in an article in the *Athenaeum* that the tale was not ‘true to life’.⁴ However Kipling’s account of his sufferings at Southsea is confirmed by his sister Trix, and a plausible explanation of his statement about the tale not being realistic is that he did not wish to hurt his parents.⁵ Furthermore, physical punishment of children was common at the time, especially in evangelical households. William Booth and Catherine Booth, for instance, the founders of the Salvation Army, approved of whipping their eldest child when he was barely one year old ‘to obtain mastery’.⁶

Whether Kipling exaggerated his childhood sufferings or not, the experience left him with a dislike and contempt for evangelicalism, which he expresses in some of his early writings by attacking the missionary project in India and Africa. In this respect he shared ‘the ICS [Indian Civil Service] distrust of missionaries, who complicated Civilian’s work by provoking native unrest and who did not understand why you should “save bodies and leave souls alone”’, as David Gilmour puts it.⁷ Kipling’s little-known poem ‘The Supplication of Kerr Cross, Missionary’ (1888) is a satirical verse in which he uses an actual incident in Africa to satirise the missionary endeavour of conquest and conversion. The final verse spells out his critical intent:

Creator of the countless suns,
We spread the message of the Cross,
Grant that we smuggle safe those guns
And horribly avenge our loss!
So shall we teach, by death and dearth,

⁴ Quoted in Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: his Life and Work* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 142.

⁵ Mrs R. Fleming, ‘Some Reminiscences of my Brother’, *Kipling Journal*, 44 (1937), 116–21; Alice Macdonald Fleming, ‘My Brother, Rudyard Kipling’, *Kipling Journal*, 84 (1947), 3–5.

⁶ Roy Hattersley, *Blood and Fire: William and Catherine Booth and their Salvation Army* (London: Abacus, 2000), p. 91.

⁷ David Gilmour, *The Long Recession: the Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 58.

Goodwill to men and peace on earth.⁸

In the same year Kipling wrote two short fictions also bitterly satirical about missionary endeavours. 'The Judgement of Dungara' concerns an act of revenge perpetrated on two German missionaries who have come to the country of Buria Kol, a wild and lawless people, to convert them to Christianity.⁹ The missionaries make forty converts and plan an initiation ceremony for them. The priest of Dungara, the local god, persuades them that he can weave cloth for the ceremony from a local plant, which is in fact a poisonous fibre. The converts writhe in agony when they put their new clothes on, tear them off, and rush down to the river to cleanse themselves, in an obvious parody of baptism. The priest declares that this is the judgement of Dungara and drives the missionaries out. The tone of the story is both vengeful and gleeful: the missionaries have been worsted by a cleverer opponent and will never return.

A further telling example occurs in Kipling's story 'Lispeth', which he returned to in the writing of *Kim*. This story, one of the most powerful tales in his collection *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), presents a character who is treated cruelly by missionaries. Lispeth is a hill girl from the Himalayas. She is entrusted to the care of the Christian Mission of the area after the death of her parents. The chaplain and his wife give her a new name, Elizabeth, and educate her in Christian principles. She grows up to be both virtuous and beautiful: 'whether Christianity improved Lispeth, or whether the Gods of her own people would have done as much for her under any circumstances, I do not know', remarks the narrator sardonically.¹⁰ Lispeth finds a wounded man on the road, brings him back to nurse him, and announces that she will marry him because she loves him so much. The Chaplain's wife is horrified at the thought because the wounded man is English, and persuades the man to tell Lispeth a lie, that he will indeed return to marry her. Lispeth believes the lie, and desperately waits for him. In the end the Chaplain's wife tells her that he had never meant to marry her, and that 'it was wrong and improper of Lispeth to

⁸ Emanul Karim, 'Rudyard Kipling's Uncollected Poem on Africa: "The Supplication of Kerr Cross, Missionary"', *Victorian Poetry*, 17 (1979), 395–98 (p. 397).

⁹ First published in *Week's News*, Allahabad, 28 July 1888, as 'The Peculiar Embarrassment of Justus Kenk'.

¹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, 'Lispeth', in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 7–11 (p. 7). Further references are given in the text.

think of marriage with an English man, who was of a superior clay, besides being promised in marriage to a girl of his own people' (10–11). Uncomprehending and devastated, Lispeth accuses both the Englishman and the Chaplain's wife of lying. The Chaplain's wife 'bowed her head, and said nothing', because she does not believe that she needs to explain her conduct, which to her is self-evidently right (11). Lispeth then repudiates her upbringing and her new religion, strips herself of her clothes, and goes back to her 'unclean' people, declaring angrily, 'you are all liars, you English' (11). She becomes a servant of Tarka Devi, the Hindu goddess of the dawn. 'I believe that Lispeth was always at heart an infidel', is the judgement of the Chaplain's wife, provoking the narrator's tart assessment, 'seeing she had been taken into the Church of England at the mature age of five weeks, this statement does not do credit to the Chaplain's wife' (11).

The bitterness Kipling expresses in this tale about the missionary endeavour is encapsulated in the verse that heads the story, entitled 'The Convert':

Look, you have cast out Love! What Gods are these
 You bid me please?
 The Three in One, the One in Three? Not so!
 To my own gods I go.
 It may be they shall give me greater ease
 Than your cold Christ and tangled Trinities. (7)

The phrase 'cold Christ' is a telling echo of Swinburne's 'O pale Galilaean' in his poem 'Hymn to Proserpine', a work which is critical of Christianity and celebrates the pagan gods of the Greek mysteries. (Kipling knew Swinburne's poems well.)¹¹ The word 'cold' in this context, though, does not posit a difference between Christianity and paganism but suggests the loveless treatment that Lispeth has received from the missionaries. The 'tangled Trinities', furthermore, mark Kipling's dislike for the abstruse theology of Christian apologetics which prevents its adherents practising simple virtue.¹² However Kipling does not make leaving the

¹¹ See Ann Matlack Weygandt, *Kipling's Reading and its Influence on his Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1939), p. 125. Kipling's early poem 'How the Goddess Awakened' has the same theme as 'Hymn to Proserpine'.

¹² It is true that Kipling wrote in a letter to Caroline Taylor in 1889 that while not believing in eternal reward or eternal punishment he did believe in 'God the Father Almighty maker of Heaven and Earth and in one filled with His spirit who did voluntarily die in the belief that the human race would be spiritually bettered thereby'. However the letter is best taken as Kipling's attempt to reassure Caroline Taylor's father that he was fairly orthodox in

Mission coincide with a happy ending to LISPETH's story. Her impoverished fate is presented with harsh realism: 'she married a woodcutter who beat her after the manner of *paharis* [hillmen], and her beauty faded soon [...] [She becomes] a bleared, wrinkled creature, exactly like a wisp of charred rag' (11). LISPETH is destroyed by harsh and unloving treatment.

A more extended treatment of the effects of cruelty in childhood resulting from a rigid adherence to evangelical beliefs characterises Kipling's first published novel, *The Light that Failed*, written when he was in London in 1890. Because of the novel's bleakness and perceived misogyny critics have struggled to understand it.¹³ For example, Henry James called it 'the most youthfully infirm of his productions', while Edmund Gosse disliked the characters and J. M. Barrie thought it immature and lacking in experience of life.¹⁴ Later critics were harsher: Lord Birkenhead, Kipling's first biographer, described it as 'the only rotten apple in [the] teeming orchard' of Kipling's writings in 1890. For Angus Wilson the novel is 'a farrago [...] of misogyny and self-pity'.¹⁵ Even as sympathetic a reader as Mark Kinkead-Weekes states bluntly, '*The Light that Failed* shows him [Kipling] at his most brutal and adolescent, with dark streaks of violence and sadism, and a bitter contempt for women and their love'.¹⁶ There is certainly a rawness and sense of misery in the novel that makes it uncomfortable to read. Some of this can be traced to Kipling's experiences at the time he was writing, which were testing ones. He was living in London for the first time as an adult and exiled from his beloved India; he had made an unsuccessful attempt to rekindle a love affair with Flo Garrard, his first love; and he was concerned about his reception by London literary society following his phenomenal early success as a writer. He was also pressed by the necessity of making money, an anxiety funnelled into his ambitions to write a best-selling novel. These experiences are all reflected in the novel. However the main impetus is the

belief because of his wish to marry her. He assures her that 'neither in word nor in deed will I do anything to say or divert your faith'. *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Thomas Pinney, 6 vols (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990–2004), I (1990), p. 378.

¹³ Rudyard Kipling, *The Light that Failed* (London: Penguin, 1988). Page numbers are given in the text.

¹⁴ *Kipling: the Critical Heritage*, ed. by Roger Lancelyn Green (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 68, 116, 84.

¹⁵ Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), p. 123; Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Granada, 1979), p. 156.

¹⁶ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'Vision in Kipling's Novels', in *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), pp. 197–234 (p. 197).

working out of the idea of what kind of adults are produced by cruel and vindictive treatment in childhood.

The two main characters, Maisie and Dick, are orphans, fostered by an evangelical woman, Mrs Jennett, whose only interest is the money she can make from looking after them. Mrs Jennett is incapable of love: 'Where he [Dick] had looked for love, she gave him first aversion and then hate. Where he growing older had sought a little sympathy, she gave him ridicule', words which, as Robert Hampson has noted, seem an inversion of those of St. Francis of Assisi, and thus show how far Mrs Jennett's practice is from the religion she professes (8).¹⁷ She punishes Dick for having 'a heavy account to settle with his Creator', and so 'Dick learned to loathe his God as intensely as he loathed Mrs Jennett' (8). Fear of pain turns Dick into a 'hopeless liar', and he is regularly beaten both at home and at school (8). He is described as 'unkept in body and savage in soul' (9). The unusual word 'unkept' where the reader expects 'unkempt' underlines the lack of care that Dick receives.

Maisie, too, is an unloved child. She is described as a 'little atom' who only loves her pet goat Amomma (8). Maisie has learnt to be both self-controlled and defiant, and it is the 'stress of punishment shared in common' that drives the children together (9). As an act of defiance they acquire a pistol and practise firing it, and at one point Maisie nearly blinds Dick by firing the pistol accidentally, a forewarning of her destructive power. When Maisie tells him she is leaving Mrs Jennett's to be educated elsewhere, Dick realises that he cares for her. Under pressure Maisie admits that she cares for him too, and Dick feels happy for the first time in his life. However that night he dreams that:

He had won all the world and brought it to Maisie in a cartridge-box, but she turned it over with her foot, and, instead of saying, 'Thank you', cried —

'Where is the grass collar you promised for Amomma? Oh, how selfish you are!' (16)

The dream prefigures Dick's realisation that Maisie will never love him. She only

¹⁷ Robert Hampson, 'Kipling and the Fin-de-Siècle', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Howard J. Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 7–22 (p. 19).

has feelings for her pet goat and not for any human being. Both Dick and Maisie are presented as solipsistic 'atoms', incapable of human affection, because of the lack of love in their childhood. Kipling extends the theme of the destruction of the child from 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' to show how children thus treated could develop and become alienated adults if there were no kindly parents to intervene, as there were in his own case.

In the bleak and despairing world that Kipling presents in *The Light that Failed* no form of religious faith is consolation. When Dick consults an oculist about his fear of blindness, he leafs through a Christmas carol book in the waiting room. One of the carols is 'the Seven Joys of Mary' and celebrates Christ's miraculous powers of 'making the blind to see' (125). There is no such miracle for Dick, whose blindness is inexorable, and there is no consolation for him in religious faith. Providence, for Dick, is a force that 'delights in causing pain' (184). As his situation deteriorates, his pain is intensified by the consciousness of his suffering:

Though a man prayed for hundreds of years that his mind might be taken from him, God would never hear. Rather the mind was quickened and the revolving thoughts ground against each other as millstones grind when there is no corn between; and yet the brain would not wear out and give him rest. (167)

The image of the millstones suggests that Dick is being crushed under the weight of his misery and that only in death will he find relief. The one constant pleasure in his life has been his friendships with men who understand his work, but this is not enough to give him any hope for living. The last service his friend Torpenhow can do for him is to place him in the 'forefront of the battle' so that he is killed quickly (208).

The idea of blindness plays an important part in the novel and has its roots in Kipling's own experience. The young Kipling was only reunited with his mother when she was alerted to the fact that he was nearly blind and came to rescue him from the 'House of Desolation'.¹⁸ Thereafter Kipling was prevented from joining the Army because of his poor sight, and in fact he had a life-long terror of going blind. Dick Heldar, on the other hand, does not suffer from short-sightedness: his blindness

¹⁸ 'A man came down to see me as to my eyes and reported I was half-blind'. Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 18.

is of a different order. Like the blind woman in Kipling's story 'They', discussed in the previous chapter, he is unable to understand the world, but unlike the blind woman, this is due to his arrogance and overweening trust in his own powers and abilities, especially his belief that he has created a masterpiece. The reference quoted above to the carol celebrating Christ's power of healing the blind indicates the ironic resonances of the narrative. In the gospel of John, chapter nine, certainly known to Kipling because a verse from the chapter was carved above his fireplace in Vermont, the writer explores the ideas of spiritual blindness and spiritual insight. The man born blind recognises that Jesus has healed him and believes in him; the Pharisees, who think that they know and understand, refuse to believe the evidence of their eyes. They think they see, but they are blind.

Dick Heldar, too, thinks, wrongly, that he sees and understands the world. His blindness is moral and spiritual, caused by the cruelty and lack of love in his childhood. Unlike Kipling himself, he has no mother to rescue him from blindness. *The Light that Failed* dismally works out what could have transpired had Kipling been left unprotected in the 'House of Desolation'.

Kim, like Dick, is an orphan, but while Dick suffers cruelty and punishment as a child, Kim is free and happy on the streets of Lahore as 'the Little Friend of all the World', Kipling's own childhood nickname. His spiritual growth begins when he meets the gentle and loving lama. *Kim* presents a possible future for Kipling: it is an imagined childhood, a fantasy of a life that he could have led had he not been sent to England aged five. Such 'counterfactual imaginings' have been discussed by Andrew Miller in relation to Dickens, who, like Kipling, had a period in childhood of feeling neglected and abandoned, powerful emotions that he never forgot, and that are revealed in the autobiographical fragment that he, Dickens, wrote in later life:

My whole nature was so penetrated by grief and humiliation [...] that, even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.¹⁹

Miller argues that Dickens's sense of resentment at his treatment at the blacking factory and his fury at his mother's decision to keep him there colours much of his

¹⁹ Andrew Miller, 'Lives Unled in Realist Fiction', *Representations*, 98 (2007), 118–35 (p. 120).

fiction. Many of Dickens's characters lament the future they could have had, a feeling that Miller characterises as 'optative regret'. In fact, Miller characterises the realist novel as 'intrinsically optative', in that fiction is so often concerned with what might have been and with unrealized lives and actual regrets. However, unlike Dickens, who never reimagined his own childhood as idyllic, Kipling created, in *Kim*, the life of a child who had never known torments or adult cruelty, a child who could go anywhere and mix with any community in India. Kipling fictionalises the life that he wished he could have had, the 'real life' that he never led. Fiction allows Kipling to imagine another past and an experience of religion far removed from the evangelical terrors that he experienced at Southsea, religion transmitted by a kindly, good, and holy man — who, at the same time, is a very good father, and in this way Kipling transcends the horrors of life in Southsea. But *Kim* is also remarkable for the protagonist's insistent questioning of his own identity, a questioning that is only resolved at the end of the novel when Kim has a visionary experience of the reality of the world and learns of the lama's selfless love for him.

It was Buddhism that provided the alternative world-view that allowed Kipling creatively to move on from the grief and anguish caused by his childhood experiences of evangelical Christianity. In this sense *Kim* is a novel of healing, which, in J. M. S. Tompkins' words, reveals 'a permitted play of the compassionate fancy, restoring, healing, renewing, "making up" in terms of the imagination for the uncomforted miseries, the irretrievable mistakes, that lie outside the charmed circle'.²⁰ Tompkins is characterising some of Kipling's later stories, but her description of the 'compassionate fancy' which creates a 'charmed circle' is also appropriate as a characterisation of *Kim*.

What, then, led to Kipling's wish to create the 'charmed circle' of life in India in this novel and to move beyond his angry feelings about life in Southsea? Furthermore, why does he use Buddhist ideas to construct his celebration of the love between Kim and the lama? Why indeed does he wish to frame his understanding of human relationships in religious terms at all? Any answer must of necessity be

²⁰ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 182.

speculative, since, apart from *Kim*, Kipling wrote about Buddhism very little.²¹ His reported remark to the MP Thelma Cazalet-Keir, when they had both encountered the famous mimic and impersonator Ruth Draper, that of all the figures in the world he would most like to ‘personate’ the Buddha because ‘he had attained what he called supreme and absolute enlightenment on all the realities of life’ is a tantalisingly brief glimpse of what the religion might have meant to him.²²

One obvious biographical point to make is that Kipling’s life changed radically during the 1890s, the period in which he was working on *Kim*. Kipling had always enjoyed the company of children and when his first child, Josephine, was born in 1892, she became his ‘idol’, according to Mary Cabot, the Kiplings’ neighbour in Vermont.²³ He was just as delighted by the births of Elsie and John in 1896 and 1897. The death of Josephine in 1899 was a bitter blow and no doubt caused him to revisit his own early griefs in the light of this loss and to consider how his life had been transformed by her birth.²⁴

The novel also reflects the closeness between Kipling and his father, a closeness that made up for the years of separation when Kipling was a child. Their collaboration in writing the novel seems from Kipling’s autobiography to have been entirely harmonious. Kipling drew extensively on his father’s memories of India and its people and indeed he credits Lockwood with providing ‘that single touch of the low-driving sunlight which makes luminous every detail in the picture of the Grand Trunk Road at eventide’. ‘Between us’, he adds, ‘we knew every step, sight and smell on [Kim’s] casual road, as well as all the persons that he met’.²⁵ Kipling used his father’s extensive knowledge of Buddhism and his memories of India in *Kim*, which he himself described in a letter as ‘more temperate and wise than much of my

²¹ Apart from the poem ‘The Buddha at Kamakura’ (1892), there are scattered references in his travel writings to Buddhist temples and Buddhist legends. His late poem ‘The Disciple’ (1932) mentions the Buddha as one of those religious figures betrayed by their disciples.

²² Thelma Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings* (London: Bodley Head, 1967), p. 35.

²³ Quoted in Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 245.

²⁴ Kipling’s devotion to his children can best be seen in the letters he wrote to them, collected in *O Beloved Kids*, ed. by Elliot L. Gilbert (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

²⁵ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, pp. 106, 105.

stuff', implicitly acknowledging the influence of his famously kindly father.²⁶

The 1890s saw a development in Kipling's views on religion, too. *Kim* presents religious belief (other than Christianity) seriously and with respect. An influence on Kipling's thinking in this period may well have been the philosopher William James, whom he knew through James's brother Henry. William James stayed with the Kiplings in Vermont in 1895, and it is plausible that the two men discussed religion in general and Buddhism in particular.²⁷ In *The Will to Believe, and other Essays* (1896), James discusses the nature of belief, contrasting the impulse to despair and suicide with religious faith. Exploring the nature of such faith in one of the essays in *The Will to Believe*, 'Is Life Worth Living?', James writes:

Our faculties of belief were not primarily given us to make orthodoxies and heresies withal; they were given us to live by. And to trust our religious demands means first of all to live in the light of them, and to act as if the invisible world which they suggest were real [...] The bare assurance that this natural order is not ultimate but a mere sign or vision, the external staging of a many-storied universe, in which spiritual forces have the last word and are eternal — this bare assurance is to such men enough to make life seem worth living.²⁸

James's characterisation of religious belief here as a matter of trust in the existence of spiritual forces and his insistence on the importance of religious experience, which received a more extensive treatment in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), were very likely topics for discussion when he stayed with Kipling in Vermont in 1895. This understanding of religious belief as trust is a way for Kipling to move beyond the terrors and fears of his childhood and the obsession with loneliness and stress that we find in many of his early stories and in his novel *The Light that Failed* (1890). However, *Kim* can still be placed in the tradition of Kipling's anti-missionary and anti-evangelical writings, as an examination of the latter's generic features will show.

²⁶ Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 15 January 1900, in *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Thomas Pinney, 6 vols (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990–2004), III (1996), p. 11.

²⁷ For James's interest in Buddhism, see David Scott, 'William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the Orient', *Religion*, 30 (2000), 333–52. The evidence for James's stay in Vermont is to be found in the journal of Mary Cabot, found online at <http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg/vermont_cabot.htm> [accessed 25 February 2016]

²⁸ William James, 'Is Life Worth Living?' in *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1912), pp. 32–62 (pp. 56–57).

***Kim*: an Anti-Evangelical Novel**

The plot of an English child who grows up in an alien Indian culture is a well-established trope in Victorian literature and *Kim* has been placed within this tradition.²⁹ However *Kim* is more plausibly linked with another genre which was also common in the nineteenth century, the missionary tale, in which an English boy sets out to convert the natives in India. One example of such a tale is the narrative *Tulsipur Fair: or Glimpses of Life in Northern India* by the Rev. B. H. Badley (1849–1891), an American Methodist minister.³⁰ As Simon Digby argues, Kipling may well have known this tale because it is set in North India and the Himalayas, an area that he knew well. The story concerns a young British boy, Horace, who travels around North India with his family, preaching the gospel to Hindu pilgrims. An unusual feature of the narrative is the insertion at one point of the story of the Buddha's life. However, there is no spiritual authority given to Buddhism in this text, and the claims of Christianity are nowhere questioned. Horace's reaction to the information about the Buddha's life and Buddhist beliefs that he is given is entirely orthodox: 'how sad that Buddha could be happy only in this world, knowing nothing of the great life to come, when those who love Jesus shall be with Him and see Him as He is!' (94). The novel ends with the author making a plea for more missionaries, because the 'salvation of India is worth all that it can ever cost of money or of life' (175). If Kipling had read this tale, which is not known, he might well have conceived *Kim* as a riposte to this sort of writing and its presumption of superiority.

²⁹ Two sources mentioned by Bart Moore-Gilbert in *Kipling and 'Orientalism'* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 23–24, are 'Who was that Child?' by John Lang (1859) and *The Story of Sonny Sahib* by Sara Jeannette Duncan (1894). 'Who was that Child?' is not a short story as Moore-Gilbert claims but a page heading from a chapter entitled 'Marching' from Lang's book *Wanderings in India* (1859). The chapter contains a story told to the narrator about an English boy raised in an alien culture by an Afghan trader. The boy in Lang's story is immediately recognisable as different from his adoptive father and his unalterable 'natural' identity, as the son of an Army officer, awaits discovery so that he can assume his rightful place in an English family and English society. *The Story of Sonny Sahib* is a tale set in the year of the Sepoy or Indian Mutiny, 1857, and concerns an English baby who is taken to live in one of the Indian independent states by his ayah [nurse] who assumes that his parents are dead. Sonny Sahib is brought up speaking no English but is always discernibly different from the other boys. When, eventually, the British Army comes to annexe the state, Sonny Sahib escapes and finds his way to their encampment, is reunited with his father, and happily assumes his English identity.

³⁰ Simon Digby, 'Tulsipur Fair, or the Boy Missionary: a Source for Kipling's *Kim*', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 25 (1998), 106–25; B. H. Badley, *Tulsipur Fair: Glimpses of Life in North India* (London: Religious Tract Society [n.d.]). The first edition of the work was published under the title *The Mela at Tulsipur*. Further references to Badley are given in the text.

We do have evidence, though, that Kipling knew the best-known version of the conversion missionary tale set in India, *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer Boosy* (1814) by the evangelical writer Mary Martha Sherwood (1775–1851), which was translated into numerous languages, and reached a thirty-seventh edition by 1850.³¹ Sherwood was ‘the most successful and influential evangelical writer for children in the nineteenth century’.³² She wrote over four hundred books, of which *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer Boosy* was one of the most popular. The novel’s publication coincided with the Charter Act of 1813 which licensed missionary activity in India for the first time, and it reinforces the missionary message of the superiority of Christianity to other religions. Before 1813 the East India Company had believed that British missionaries ‘could potentially get in the way of their economic endeavours by offending Indian religious beliefs’, but the evangelical revival in England and in particular the efforts of William Wilberforce proved potent forces to effect change in the Company’s policy.³³ Sherwood herself ran mission schools in India both for the children of soldiers and for Indian children.

It is plausible that Kipling encountered the book as a child when living in the home of Mrs Holloway, where he was given improving books to read.³⁴ There are references to *Little Henry* in Kipling’s short story ‘William the Conqueror’ (1892) and in his travel writing, where he distinguishes ‘the real India’ from ‘the little Henry and his Bearer country, all paddy, palmyra, and coconut palms, as the books draw it’.³⁵ The implication is that Mrs Sherwood is not writing about India as it is but rather constructing it as a land in a fairy tale. The focus of *Little Henry*, common to evangelical tracts of the same sort, is the salvation of one’s soul and the importance of conversion to save the souls of others so that they too avoid the punishments of hell.

³¹ Patricia Demers, ‘Mary Martha Sherwood’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 15 June 2015]; Sherwood, Mary Martha, *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer Boosy*, 37th edn (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1850).

³² John Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: the Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 147.

³³ Supriya Goswami, *Colonial India in Children’s Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 16.

³⁴ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, pp. 10, 11.

³⁵ *Kipling Abroad: Traffics and Discoveries from Burma to Brazil*, ed. by Andrew Lycett (London: Tauris, 2000), p. 65. The original article in which Kipling wrote these words was published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 25 December 1891.

A brief synopsis of the plot of *Little Henry* will show the similarities to and differences from *Kim*. Like Kim, Henry is an orphan but instead of growing up on the streets of Lahore he is taken into the household of a British woman following the death of his parents. Like Kim, Henry has a close and loving relationship with an adult of a different religion, his bearer, the Hindu Boosy, and, again like Kim, Henry grows up speaking Hindustani and dressed like an Indian child. The difference, though, is that Henry can never be mistaken for an Indian child: 'his delicate complexion, light hair, and blue eyes, at once showed his parentage'.³⁶ Initially Henry assimilates Boosy's Hinduism, believing that 'there were a great many gods' (15) and that the Christian God whom his mother had worshipped was 'no better than the gods of wood, and stone, and clay, which his bearer worshipped' (16). However, when he is five he is taught both English and Christianity by a young woman just arrived from England, who teaches Henry that there is only one God and smashes one of Boosy's Hindu images to make the point. She instructs Henry about the nature of God, sin, and eternal punishment, gives him a Bible to read, and urges the child to convert Boosy. Boosy, though, does not believe in the exclusiveness of any one religion. He tells Henry, 'there are many brooks and rivers of water, but they all run into the sea at last; so there are a great many religions, but they all lead to heaven' (66–67). Henry has no success with Boosy's conversion until he is taught to read Hindustani by a friend of the family and in this way instructs Boosy by teaching him to read the Bible in his own language. When, enfeebled by the rigours of the Indian climate, Henry dies, Boosy is able to read to him on his death bed from the Hindustani Bible. This experience inspires Boosy to convert to Christianity after Henry's death. The book ends with the exhortation to 'little children in India' to 'go and do likewise' (138), thus making the evangelical purpose of the story explicit.

Kipling's Kim is also an orphan, but he is quite removed from the Anglo-Indian community when the novel opens, since he lives on the streets of Lahore and survives by his wits. In fact, he does not wish to be identified as English — or Irish — and has 'learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was'.³⁷ Unlike Henry, he is not identifiable as European but can pass as

³⁶ Sherwood, *Little Henry*, p.14. Further references are given in the text.

³⁷ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Alan Sandison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 2. Further references are given in the text.

belonging to any race and any faith: he is ‘the Little Friend of all the World’ (3). Like Henry, Kim is instructed in both the English language and in Christianity, but then repudiates both when he leaves school to rejoin the lama on his pilgrimage. Unlike Boosy, the lama is not Kim’s servant but his spiritual teacher, and the lama educates Kim not through texts such as the Bible but through the painting of the Wheel of Life and by his example of living the Buddhist Way. Kim is not enfeebled by Indian life or the Indian climate as Henry is; on the contrary, he is energised and excited by the richness and variety of the Indian landscape and its peoples. Henry dies young, and the whole thrust of the novel is the fate of his immortal soul, and that of Boosy, after death. Kim embraces life at the end of the novel, secure in the knowledge of the love that the lama has demonstrated to him. The lama achieves a glimpse of Nirvana in this life rather than as a promise after death, and indeed the climax of the novel comes with the lama’s enlightenment. In *Kim* Kipling carefully stages a repudiation of the major tenets of the evangelical Christian agenda of conversion, especially the fear of hell and its terrors. Buddhism is presented as a rich and real alternative that can embrace ideals of loving care and reject the thinking that *Little Henry* embodies.

For this reason Kipling distinguishes the lama sharply from the Christian chaplains that he and Kim encounter. Arthur Bennett, the Anglican chaplain to the regiment of Kim’s father, is presented as both stupid and aggressive, a version of Aunty Rosa in ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’ and Mrs Jennett in *The Light that Failed*. Bennett’s reaction on seeing Kim for the first time is violent: he catches the boy by the throat and ‘nearly’ chokes ‘the life out of him’ (84). His reaction to the lama is scornful and dismissive. The lama is described as ‘dignified and unsuspicious’ when he meets the chaplains, and his fine qualities are suggested in the sentence ‘the yellow lining of the tent reflected in the lamp-light made his [the lama’s] face red-gold’, gold referring to a precious quality in him as well as the timbre of his skin. Bennett however is portrayed as contemptuous and unaware of the lama’s spiritual qualities: he looks at the lama ‘with the triple-ringed uninterest of the creed that lumps nine-tenths of the world under the title of “heathen”’ (88). The compound adjective ‘triple-ringed’ suggests the barriers put round Bennett’s type of faith to keep others out. Bennett is culpably ignorant: he knows and cares nothing of the religions of the majority of the world.

Father Victor, the Roman Catholic chaplain, is portrayed more favourably, probably because Kipling does not associate Catholicism with militant evangelicalism. Although he does not understand what the lama is saying about his coming separation from Kim, he is 'wise in the confessional' and hears 'the pain in every sentence' (92). Nevertheless he too is portrayed as ignorant. He feels it is 'predestined' that they should have met Kim, whose father was a member of the regiment, and tries to convey this to the lama by using the two words 'Kismet' and 'mallum'. 'Kismet' is an Arabic word for fate or destiny and 'mallum' is Hindustani for 'do you understand?' The lama is neither Muslim nor Hindu and does not speak Arabic or Hindustani. Father Victor lumps all non-Christian faiths together, misunderstanding cultural differences as he uses different languages. The limitations of his linguistic competence in languages mirror the limitations of his understanding generally.

The two chaplains are convinced that Kim must receive the education and religious instruction appropriate to a boy who looks Indian but is in fact white. They arrange for him to be sent to the best school in India, St Xavier's in Lucknow, to be educated as a Christian. However Kim resists this new identity, as I explore in the next section, and refuses to become a sahib, a complete reversal of the expected outcome of a missionary novel.

As a riposte to *Little Henry* and its evangelising agenda, then, *Kim* can be read as an anti-evangelical and anti-missionary novel. However, it is very far from being 'a novel of doubt' as the term is usually understood. J. Russell Perkin defines the 'novel of doubt' as one which dramatizes 'the loss of faith in orthodox Christianity and the quest for a new structure of belief'.³⁸ The best-known example of such a novel in the final decades of the nineteenth century, which Kipling was certainly aware of, was Mary Augusta Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888), in which a young Anglican clergyman is forced by conversations with a religious sceptic to doubt his belief in the divinity and resurrection of Christ.³⁹ Elsmere comes to accept

³⁸ J. Russell Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), p. 59.

³⁹ Mrs Humphry Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (London: Smith and Elder, 1888). Kipling was aware of *Robert Elsmere* and the controversy surrounding its publication. He refers to it simply as 'Robert' in his conversation with Mark Twain about reading controversial

a merely human Jesus like that portrayed by Ernest Renan in *The Life of Jesus* (1854). As Perkin puts it, ‘faith is thus subordinate to reason for Elsmere [...] and he is convinced by his own logic that he must resign his living and give up his Anglican orders’.⁴⁰ Elsmere embraces a kind of ethical theism and in the end finds some sort of fulfilment in working with the poor in London’s East End. In this sense he discovers a new ‘structure of belief’, in Perkins’s sense.

The boy Kim does not fit into this mould and *Kim* clearly disrupts the expectations of the genre. At the beginning of the novel he has no faith to lose and can slip in and out of different religious identities; by the end he has been inducted into the Buddhist Way, or Dharma, not through intellectual argument but through the example of the lama’s practice and struggle to understand the meaning of the Wheel of Life. *Kim* is, if anything, a novel of faith in its sympathetic portrayal of Buddhism, but in that respect it is quite unlike other writings of this genre in the nineteenth century, because they concern themselves with varieties of Christian belief and with the possibility or otherwise of intellectual assent to articles of Christian faith. The religious faith that Kipling depicts in *Kim* is a matter of practice inspired by the example of a teacher: Kim is inducted into the Buddhist religion by taking part in the lama’s devotions and by imitating his charitable actions, for example when he heals a sick child at the Jat Temple. (It is noteworthy that the lama never discusses Buddhist texts with Kim, and he never requires Kim to assent to any religious propositions.) Religion is presented as lived experience and furthermore as experience that is acquired by contact with a spiritual teacher, a view of religion that valorises experience and relationship over what is learned from texts.

Because the novel is concerned with the spiritual development of both Kim and the lama, I think it is best characterised as a religious bildungsroman, defined by John R. Maynard as a genre ‘overlapping the Victorian genre sometimes treated as the religious novel’.⁴¹ The notion of the religious bildungsroman has been explored in a recent book by Kelsey L. Bennett, in which she applies the concept to some canonical nineteenth-century texts, including *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*.

novels. Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1890), II, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel*, p. 121.

⁴¹ John R. Maynard, ‘The Bildungsroman’, in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 279–301 (p. 295).

Emphasising the importance of reading Victorian novels against a theological background, Bennett argues that 'Bronte's concept of self-formation in *Jane Eyre* exhibits definite affinities with Wesley's Arminian spiritual empiricism'.⁴² Bennett's book is important in emphasising the Christian roots of much nineteenth-century fiction, but what is innovative about *Kim* is the transposition of such ideas outside Christian tradition. Kim grows and develops in religious understanding, seen in Buddhist terms, and in particular comes to understand the fundamental Buddhist beliefs of the impermanence of the self and the importance of love between teacher and disciple. At the end of the novel, furthermore, Kim experiences a kind of religious awareness which is described by the narrator in terms of Buddhist meditation. Many critics have argued that the ending of the novel feels incomplete. However reading *Kim* in the light of Buddhist concepts allows us to see that, on the contrary, the novel does come to a satisfactory ending with the lama realising his role as a bodhisattva and Kim established on the path of discipleship. The traditional bildungsroman is concerned with the protagonist's finding an identity as he or she grows into adulthood. In this novel the genre is extended and to an extent subverted, since Kim does indeed grow and mature in the course of the novel but the identity that he discovers is one that recognises and accepts that there is no permanent self and that identity is to be found in loving relationships. Thus *Kim* can be categorised as a new kind of religious novel and a new kind of bildungsroman.

Why Buddhism?

Why did Kipling decide to turn to Buddhism to configure his vision of an imagined future in India for his alter ego, the boy Kim? I have discussed earlier the profound personal changes in Kipling's life during the 1890s, the period in which he was composing *Kim*. By working on the novel with his father he was able to recreate the closeness lost during the Southsea years, and he used his father's memories of India extensively in the novel's construction, as his autobiography makes clear. Because he and his father collaborated so closely on the novel, Kipling was able to leave behind the solitary anguish and misery that his experiences at Southsea had left him with and to present an alternative, and healing, religious vision.

⁴² Kelsey L. Bennett, *Principle and Propensity: Experience and Religion in the Nineteenth-Century British and American Bildungsroman* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), p. 67.

However Kipling might have turned to Hinduism instead of Buddhism as an alternative to Christianity. He could certainly write with great sensitivity about the spiritual search of a devout Hindu, as he did in ‘The Miracle of Purun Bhagat’ (1894), discussed in the next chapter, and his story ‘The Bridge Builders’ (1893) presents a Hindu view of time and eternity with some force and power. Kipling also adopted the ancient good luck symbol of the Hindus, the swastika, which was stamped on the cover of many of his published works, along with the image of the Hindu god Ganesha. However, like many Victorians, Kipling found aspects of Hinduism both incomprehensible and distasteful, in particular the treatment of women, the caste system, and certain temple images. One of his most scathing attacks on Hindu religion comes in his now-forgotten novel *The Naulahka* (1892), written with his close friend Wolcott Balestier. The subtitle of the novel is ‘a story of West and East’, and the West is represented by an American capitalist called Nicholas Tarvin.⁴³ Tarvin goes to India in search of a fabled necklace called the Naulakha with which he wishes to bribe the wife of a railroad owner so that the railway will be extended to his town.⁴⁴ Tarvin is in simultaneous pursuit of a would-be independent young woman called Kate Sheriff, who goes to the same Indian princely state to work in a hospital. The two worlds, West and East, are presented as complete contrasts. Tarvin is energetic, forward-looking, and eager to embrace modernity. He is determined to show Kate that she can do no good in India, and in the end she gives up her desire to alleviate the suffering of Indian women and agrees to marry him. The inhabitants of the Indian princely state are characterised in an archetypically Orientalist way as passive, indolent, childish, and totally dependent on opium, which saps their will and energy. They are superstitious and priest-ridden, resisting Kate’s modern medicines because they believe that she wishes to harm them. In one particularly grotesque scene, Tarvin enters a Hindu temple and is confronted with a scene of horror:

The formless, four-faced god Iswara [the supreme being], standing in the centre of the temple, was smeared and discoloured with stains of melted butter, and the black smoke of exhausted incense [...] Behind him, in the deeper gloom of the temple, stood other divinities, many-handed and

⁴³ Rudyard Kipling and Wolcott Balestier, *The Naulahka: a Story of West and East* (London: Heinemann, 1892). Further references are given in the text.

⁴⁴ The misspelling of the Hindi word *naulakha* in the title of the novel was never corrected.

many-headed, tossing their arms aloft, protruding their tongues, and grinning at one another. The remains of many sacrifices lay about them, and in the half light Tarvin could see that the knees of one were dark with dried blood. (176)

The word 'exhausted' in this passage and the reference to the sacrifices — probably animal, but with a gruesome hint of the human — convey the sense of a brutal, outmoded, and superstitious religion which yet has a terrifying power over the people. The images of the gods seem to be alive and laughing malevolently. Tarvin reflects that the values of Eastern and Western civilization have no meeting point: 'he [Tarvin] recognised with fresh force how entirely the life, habits, and traditions of this strange people alienated them from all that seemed good and right to him' (177). This opinion is presented with no sense of irony and echoes many of the commonly held views of Hinduism in the nineteenth century.

Buddhism, as we have seen, was generally viewed more favourably than Hinduism, and is a more palatable choice for Kipling. There was some hostility to Buddhist ideas, but they almost invariably came from those writers who advanced a Christian agenda, such as the missionary Robert Spence Hardy (1803–1868). Hardy's book *Eastern Monachism* [Monasticism] (1860), which was in Kipling's library, even looks forward to a time when Buddhism will be completely eradicated in Ceylon. For many Victorians, though, Buddhism was a religion that presented an advance over Hinduism. The Buddha was represented as a reformer who came to abolish the caste system and to end the power of the Brahmanical priests, and Buddhism was often thought to have 'reformed' Hinduism in the same way that Luther had sought to end the abuses of the Catholic Church. For example, the Unitarian James Freeman Clarke, in *Ten Great Religions* (1871) writes, 'Buddhism in Asia, like Protestantism in Europe, is a revolt of nature against spirit, of humanity against caste, of individual freedom against the despotism of an order, of salvation by faith against salvation by sacraments'.⁴⁵ Kipling does not identify Buddhism with Protestantism, but he does conform to a relatively widespread approval of the religion in Victorian Britain.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 74.

In portraying Buddhism as he does in *Kim*, Kipling draws from the version of the life of the Buddha popularized in Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879), as J. Jeffrey Franklin argues.⁴⁶ *The Light of Asia* presents the Buddha as a reformer who has come to initiate a new ethical system not based on caste. The poem concludes with a long section in which Arnold sets out the Buddha's teaching on morality. After a generalised account of karma, Nirvana and the causes of suffering, the Buddha gives specific ethical guidance to his listeners. They must:

Order so
This life of flesh that all their hither days
Pass blameless in discharge of charities
And first true footfalls in the Eightfold Path;
Living pure, reverent, patient, pitiful;
Loving all things which live even as themselves.⁴⁷

The Buddha then gives specific advice to those who are to live as monks:

Also he taught his Own how they should dwell;
How live, free from the snares of love and wealth;
What eat and carry — three plain cloths, —
Yellow, of stitched stuff, worn with shoulder bare —
A girdle, almsbowl, strainer.⁴⁸

The lama is presented as an embodiment of this ideal in *Kim*. He does indeed live a pure, reverent, patient, and pitiful [pitying] life and goes about with no possessions other than his begging bowl, his pencase, and his drawing of the Wheel of Life. In these respects he embodies the ethical teaching of Buddhism, an aspect of the religion that appealed to many Victorian readers. Kipling also makes use of particular phrases from the poem. Arnold's description of Buddhist monks as 'wakened eagles' calls to mind the image of the soaring eagle in the lama's glimpse of Nirvana, and his characterisation of the attainment of Nirvana as 'the dewdrop slips into the shining sea' is reflected in the lama's words: 'as a drop draws to water,

⁴⁶ J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 147. Kipling and Arnold met once, in Japan in 1892. There is no evidence, though, for Franklin's assertion that Kipling 'revered' Arnold. In a 1922 letter he refers dismissively to Arnold as a 'lesser' poet, and he puts one of Arnold's verses into the mouth of a silly, ignorant Englishwoman in his story 'The Bride's Progress'. See *Letters*, ed. by Thomas Pinney, V (2004), p. 126. 'The Bride's Progress' was first printed in the *Pioneer Mail* on 8 February 1888.

⁴⁷ Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia or the Great Renunciation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1903), p. 154.

⁴⁸ Arnold, *Light*, p. 156.

so my Soul grew near to the Great Soul' (288).⁴⁹

However, these linguistic echoes are the sum of Arnold's influence on Kipling, since Kipling repudiates Christian concepts in his novel, as I have shown in Chapter 1. Kim's religious development and the identity that he begins to craft for himself is as the lama's disciple and not as a Christian Sahib. In fact, Kipling uses the important Buddhist concept of anatta, or no permanent self, to explore the identity of his alternative self, the boy Kim. Critics have long recognised that identity is an important theme in the novel, but very few have linked this theme with Buddhist ideas, as I now go on to do.

Kim's Identity and the Buddhist Concept of No Fixed Self

The question of Kim's identity is introduced by Kipling at the beginning of the eighth chapter of *Kim*, which is headed by verses from his well-known poem, 'The Two-Sided Man' (1900). The poem expresses Kipling's consciousness that he has 'separate sides' to his head and that both are equally important to him: he would go without 'shirts or shoes/Friends, tobacco or bread' rather than lose 'either side' of his head (131). Although Kipling sees both 'sides' of his head as essential to him, many critics have identified them as Kipling's 'English' and 'Indian' selves and postulated a conflict between them. For instance, David Gilmour identifies a tension between the 'side that stayed with him [Kipling] in the office and the Club, mocking Indians for their political pretensions' and the other 'intensely receptive to sights, smells and sounds, [roaming] the bazaars and the native states, absorbing the experience without the need to censure'.⁵⁰ Salman Rushdie puts the point more succinctly, arguing for a difference between 'Ruddy Baba' and Kipling Sahib', in other words, the Indian child and the English adult.⁵¹ In the same vein, Ashis Nandy writes of the 'two voices' of Kipling, 'the saxophone and the oboe', the two representing 'masculine hardness and imperial responsibility on the one hand, and feminine softness and cross-cultural empathy [Indianness] on the other'.⁵²

⁴⁹ Arnold, *Light*, pp. 155, 157.

⁵⁰ Gilmour, *Recessional*, p. 54.

⁵¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 75.

⁵² Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 70. The unacknowledged source of this

The assumption of this kind of dichotomy in Kipling's thinking about himself has led critics to see a similar dichotomy in the construction of the novel. The presupposition is that there are two worlds in the novel, which the boy Kim must ultimately choose between, namely the world of the British Raj and the world of Buddhist piety. Critics have generally assumed that in the novel Kim is conflicted between his identity as 'culturally Indian and naturally British', and that at the end of the novel he chooses to be a sahib. These two worlds are felt to reflect a tension in Kipling's own mind between the 'two sides of his head'. According to this kind of reading, Kim must choose to be a servant of the Great Game or the disciple of a Buddhist lama and in the end opts for the world of 'materiality and common sense, which is *par excellence* that of the Englishman, rather than the morally superior but practically useless world of the lama', as Patrick Williams puts it.⁵³

J. Jeffrey Franklin, however, rightly draws attention to the 'culture-specific critical blindness' that this assumed dichotomy between the political world of the British raj and the world of Buddhist piety represents. He urges a 'Middle Way of reading *Kim*, one that gives the text itself credit for drawing upon and embodying the Buddhist concepts that it represents'.⁵⁴ Building upon Franklin's approach, I now examine the particular Buddhist concept of anatta, or no permanent self, and the use that Kipling makes of it in the novel. As I have argued, his characterization of the boy Kim enables Kipling to contemplate his own past and to reconstruct it as an idyll of how life could have been had he not been sent to England at the age of five and treated cruelly by his foster-mother. However, *Kim* does more than present an alternative life. By using the idea that there is no permanent identity for the individual to 'make' or adopt, Kipling is enabled to move on from the idea that there are 'separate' sides to his head. The poem thus functions as a starting point for the novel's consideration of identity, rather than the conclusion that many critics have assumed. It also, importantly, demonstrates the depth and force of Kipling's engagement with Buddhist ideas and his contribution to the British discovery of Buddhism.

metaphor is Humbert Wolfe, who uses it in *Dialogues and Monologues* (London: Gollancz, 1928) to express the musicality of Kipling's prose.

⁵³ Patrick Williams, 'Kim and Orientalism', in *Kipling Considered*, ed. by Phillip Mallett (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 33–55 (p. 50).

⁵⁴ Franklin, *Lotus*, pp. 129, 130.

The Buddhist belief that there is no fixed identity for the human being, *anatta* or *anatman*, was one that most Victorian writers found difficult, if not incomprehensible. The scientist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) was one of the few writers to link this idea with Victorian concerns. In his Romanes Lecture ‘Ethics and Evolution’ (1893), Huxley explains the Buddhist concept of no permanent self as follows:

Gautama [Buddha] proceeded to eliminate substance altogether, and to reduce the cosmos to a mere flow of sensations, emotions, volitions, and thoughts, devoid of any substratum. As, on the surface of a stream of water, we see ripples and whirlpools, which last for a while and then vanish with the causes that gave rise to them, so what seem individual existences are mere temporary associations of phenomena circling round a centre [...] In the whole universe there is nothing permanent [...] Personality is a metaphysical fantasy.⁵⁵

Huxley places the Buddhist concept of *anatta* squarely in the Western philosophical tradition of Humean scepticism about the existence of substance, or in other words scepticism about the permanence of the self. His characterisation of the doctrine of *anatta* is unusual in Victorian times and strikingly similar to that spelled out by a modern scholar of Buddhism:

The Buddha accepted many conventional usages of the ‘self’ as in ‘yourself’ and ‘myself’. These he saw as simply a convenient way of referring to a particular collection of physical and mental states. But within such a convenient, empirical self, he taught that no permanent, substantial, independent, metaphysical self could be found [...] The not-self teaching [...] is primarily a practical teaching aimed at the overcoming of attachment. It urges that all phenomena that we *do* identify with as ‘self’ should be carefully observed and examined to see that they cannot be taken as such. In doing this, a person finally comes to see *everything* [...] as not-self, thereby destroying all attachment and attaining *Nibbana* [Nirvana].⁵⁶

In other words, the Buddha accepted that people use the word ‘self’ in everyday parlance, but denied that there was any metaphysical entity which lay behind such linguistic usage. A key Buddhist text which discusses the idea of the self, known to the Victorians, was *The Questions of King Milinda*, which was translated by T. W.

⁵⁵ James Paradis and George C. Williams, *T. H. Huxley’s Evolution and Ethics: with New Essays on its Victorian and Sociobiological Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 67.

⁵⁶ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 51–52.

Rhys Davids in 1890 and published as part of the series *The Sacred Books of the East*. This dialogue purports to be a conversation between the Buddhist sage Nagasena and the Indo-Greek King Milinda, or Menander (reigned 165?–130 BCE), and was written in about 100 BCE. Nagasena describes the doctrine of the impermanence of the self by using a simile of the chariot and its constituent parts. (There is an allusion to this simile in *Kim*, which suggests that Kipling himself knew this text, as I discuss later.) In an article in the *Contemporary Review* in January 1877, Rhys Davids paraphrases the key part of the argument, in which Nagasena explains the idea of no permanent self, using the analogy of the chariot:

The mendicant asked, ‘Did your Majesty come here on foot or in a chariot?’

‘In a chariot’, was the answer.

‘What is a chariot?’ asked Nagasena. ‘Is the ornamented cover the chariot? Are the wheels, the spokes of the wheels, or the reins, the chariot? Are all these put together (in a heap) the chariot? If you leave all these out, does there remain anything which is the chariot?’

To all this the king said, ‘No’.⁵⁷

Nagasena then goes on to argue that just as there is no one thing called a ‘chariot’ apart from its constituent parts, so there is nothing called the soul apart from the qualities (skandhas) of human beings. If, having identified each individual part of a chariot, we were then to ask ‘where is the chariot?’ we would be simply confused. Similarly, the idea of the self is a useful fiction, but no more. We can point to the qualities of a human being, but we cannot identify a self that unites all these parts. This is the insight that Kim grasps when he has his vision of the reality of the world at the end of the novel. His doubts about his identity are resolved, and he realises that what is important is not preoccupation with the self but acknowledgement of the love that the lama has shown to him in deferring his enlightenment.

The notion that there is no permanent self and therefore no immortal soul seemed impossible for many in Victorian times to reconcile with the Christian doctrine of immortality, and, furthermore, to make no sense of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation: what could be reborn if there was no permanent soul that entered a

⁵⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids, ‘On Nirvana, and on the Buddhist Doctrines of the “Groups”, the Sanskaras, Karma, and the “Paths”’, *Contemporary Review*, 29 (1877), 249–70 (p. 255).

new body? This was an aspect of Buddhism that many found incomprehensible. The colonial civil servant Henry Alabaster (1836–1884) expresses a typical reaction:

The Buddhist tells me there is no soul, but there is continuation of individual existence without it. I cannot explain his statement, for I fail thoroughly to understand it, or to appreciate the subtlety of his theory.⁵⁸

Alabaster professes bafflement here about the possibility of reincarnation. Others went further, and declared that there *must* be a soul to migrate into a new body: ‘how can there be a migration of souls from one body to another, unless there are souls to migrate?’ asks the Unitarian James Freeman Clarke (1810–1888) in *Ten Great Religions* (1871). Clarke points out what he sees as a logical contradiction between the doctrine of no permanent self and the belief in reincarnation.⁵⁹

Even theosophical writers, who believed in reincarnation and generally embraced Buddhism (or their version of it), balked at the idea that there was no permanent self, which was contrary to their idea of the perfectibility of the individual through various incarnations. Henry Steel Olcott states conflicting positions in *A Buddhist Catechism* (1881), his work designed as a teaching aid to be used in Ceylon:

Does Buddhism teach the immortality of the soul? ‘Soul’, it considers a word used by the ignorant to express a false idea [...] Everything I have found in Buddhism accords with the theory of a gradual evolution of the perfected man — viz, a Buddha — through numberless natal experiences.⁶⁰

The belief in the impermanence of the soul was also felt by some to be contrary to the principles of morality, for if there was no individual survival after death and hence no future reward or punishment, then what could motivate people to behave ethically in this life? However in Buddhist thought there is actually a strong link between the letting go of the idea that the self is not eternal and moral behaviour. Selflessness on behalf of others may actually be easier with the abandonment of

⁵⁸ Henry Alabaster, *The Wheel of the Law: Buddhism Illustrated from Siamese Sources* (London: Trubner, 1871), p. lx.

⁵⁹ James Freeman Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: a Comparison of All Religions*, 2 vols (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1888) II, p. 170.

⁶⁰ Henry Steel Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism according to the Canon of the Southern Church* (London: Turner, 1882), pp. 38, 56.

attachment to the idea of the self. The modern scholar Rupert Gethin expresses the link in the following way:

The appropriating of some part or parts of the universe as mine, as opposed to yours, the desire to construct my 'self', or personal identity, must lead inevitably to self-*ish* concerns [...] We all become rivals in the fruitless struggle of trying to find something in the universe which we can grasp and call 'mine'. Selves thus cause problems for all concerned, and the aim of Buddhism is therefore to realize selflessness, both metaphysically and ethically.⁶¹

The ideal of selflessness was of course much discussed in Victorian culture. As James Walter Caulfield says, 'pulpit-pounders of every stripe, from church to chapel and from philosophy professors to popular radicals, were agreed that altruism constituted morality's first principle and chief virtue'.⁶² Debates about selflessness included a whole gamut of ideas, from calls to imitate Christ in his perfect self-denial and self-sacrifice, to fascination with Schopenhauer's ideas of annihilation of the will through resignation and detachment. However altruistic behaviour was usually seen as a matter of a conscious renunciation of self, rather than the idea that the self has no metaphysical reality. This is a concept that for Buddhists is not grasped intellectually but attained through a process of insight meditation called vipassana. This is elucidated by Gethin as follows:

Since we fail to see things as they really are [...] we grasp at them as if they were permanent, as if they could bring us lasting happiness, as if we could possess them as our very own. Thus the cultivation of calm and insight involves breaking up the seemingly substantial and enduring appearance of things.⁶³

Meditation, therefore, can bring insight into how things really are and acknowledgement that they are always in a state of flux. Thus in Buddhist thought the doctrine of no permanent self is grasped through insight meditation and the

⁶¹ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 147. Italics in the original. The title of Steven Collins's book, *Selfless Persons*, which examines the idea of anatta in depth, makes the link between the doctrine of no permanent self and unselfishness clear. Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁶² James Walter Caulfield, "'Most Free From Personality': Arnold's Touchstones of Ethics', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 38 (2009), 307–27 (p. 307). See Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), for an extended discussion of the concept.

⁶³ Gethin, *Foundations*, p. 235.

apprehension of this link is necessary in order to lead an ethical life and turn away from the self to others.

However, the link between these ideas was very little discussed in the nineteenth century. One reason for this is the fact that Buddhist meditation as a practice was hardly known. Very few Westerners encountered Buddhist meditation as a spiritual practice. Even in countries where meditation was practised, such as Burma, it was done in remote locations and not accessible to the laity. Missionaries and colonial administrators obviously did not engage in such a practice, and scholars of Buddhism in England had even fewer opportunities to encounter Buddhist practitioners, at least until the early years of the twentieth century when the Buddhist Society was founded and Allan Bennet, now the Buddhist monk Metteya, came to London to spearhead a Buddhist mission in 1908.⁶⁴

Where the practice of meditation was discussed, it was often equated with futility, indolence or nihilism. The Wesleyan missionary Samuel Langdon (1847–1908) writes of the ‘national indolence’ of the inhabitants of Ceylon, ‘which is perhaps due in no small measure to ages of teaching that contemplation is the highest of all virtues, and meditating upon nothing the holiest of all duties; the laziness expressed in the imitation of the recumbent statues of Buddha’.⁶⁵ Spence Hardy in *Eastern Monachism* does give detailed descriptions of the different types of meditation practised by the monks in Ceylon, but concludes by saying that these practices ‘lead to no practical effort of humanity’, denying that there was any link between Buddhist meditation and ethical action. It was commonly thought that the goal of meditation must be indifference, a withdrawal from practical activity to nothing.⁶⁶

Kipling certainly knew of the practice of Buddhist meditation from the statues in the Lahore Museum, many of which show the Buddha meditating. He

⁶⁴ See Asaf Federman, ‘Buddhist Meditation in Britain: 1853 and 1945’, *Religion*, 45 (2015) <doi: 001.10.1080/0048721X.2015.1027969> [accessed 14 March 2016]

⁶⁵ Samuel Langdon, *My Mission Garden* (London: Woolmer, 1886), p. 52, quoted in Elizabeth J. Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 104. Characterising Indians as lazy or indolent was a common (though not universal) trope in eighteenth and nineteenth-century writing about the subcontinent. See Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in 18th Century Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ See Harris, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 134.

would also have read in Arnold's *Light of Asia* of the Buddha's tempters before his enlightenment, one of whom is named as Attavada, or the sin of believing in the permanent self.⁶⁷ The Buddha needed to overcome the temptation of believing in the self before he could be enlightened. However, Kipling is unusual among Victorian writers in showing meditation in a positive light at the end of *Kim* and showing its connection with the idea of self. By the narrative's end, through the experience of insight meditation, Kim understands the importance of letting go of a fixed idea of the self. In this way Kipling is both presenting imaginatively a key Buddhist idea and contesting the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul.

I therefore follow J. Jeffrey Franklin in interpreting Kim's apotheosis at the end of the novel as an example of a kind of Buddhist meditation, rather than as an endorsement of Western values, as many critics have argued. The conclusion of the novel has, famously, occasioned a great deal of debate, and many readers have found it unsatisfactory and incomplete. Reading the ending from the perspective of Buddhist ideas, however, gives us a better and more compelling sense of why Kipling concluded his novel with the joy of the lama having realised his destiny as a bodhisattva and Kim understanding through meditation that he must relinquish fixed notions of the self. The novel ends with the lama declaring his love for his chela Kim and in this moment Kipling can, in imagination, finally let go of his feelings of loss and abandonment.

Kim's Identity

At first in the novel Kim, the 'Little Friend of all the World', revels in his ability to change identities since he can move between Hindu and Muslim communities with ease, dressed in appropriate clothes. However as the novel proceeds this ability to change his outward appearance takes a darker turn. When Kim is recruited into the Great Game by Colonel Creighton he is sent to the shop of Lurgan Sahib in Simla specifically to learn the arts of observation and to perfect his facility in disguise. Lurgan Sahib has a 'hawk's eye to detect any flaw in the make-up' and tells Kim exactly how each caste walks, talks, spits, sneezes, and coughs so that he can imitate it. There is something almost demonic in Kim's ability to change his outward

⁶⁷ Arnold, *Light*, p. 103.

identity by means of dress and behaviour, as the narrator indicates: 'a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith' (159). Lurgan Sahib is indeed associated with dark forces. He almost makes Kim believe through hypnosis that a smashed water-jug has regained its shape, and he writes 'charms on parchment — elaborate pentagrams crowned with the names of devils' (169). Lurgan Sahib is seductive and bewitching but everything is just show. Although his shop is crammed with precious objects he does not see their beauty, only valuing them for their utilitarian or monetary value. He represents the world of the Great Game, in which everything turns on the ability to practise disguise and deceit.

Although Kim enjoys this world and his ability to manipulate others, it also causes him to question who and what he really is behind his multiple disguises. Is Kipling here raising questions about his own facility in writing, which, famously, he puts down to inspiration from his 'daemon', a force from outside which takes over the person? 'When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait and obey', he writes in his autobiography.⁶⁸ As an author, inspired by his daemon, Kipling is enabled to inhabit multiple selves, imagining and constructing the lives of men, women, and even animals. In the person of Kim, his alter ego, Kipling questions what if anything lies behind these selves, and he uses the Buddhist concept of anatta to do so. Kim's questions about his own identity, which recur throughout the novel, are resolved at the end when he realises that there is no fixed identity for the human being and that what is important is relationships, and especially his loving relationship with the lama. In this way, as J. Jeffrey Franklin argues, Kipling works out one resolution to the question of the identity of the self and moves beyond the dichotomies of West/East or English/Indian that many critics have seen as constituting the heart of the novel. Whatever Kipling meant in his poem about the two sides of his head, the fact is that the novel presents a way of transcending conflicts in the understanding of self by locating true self-knowledge, paradoxically, in the abandonment of the idea of a permanent, fixed identity while elevating the importance of loving relationships.

⁶⁸ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 157.

It is striking, and little commented upon, that Kim uses religious concepts and ideas as he questions his identity. On the first occasion he is on his way to school where he has to assume the new identity of a Sahib — and a Christian one:

‘But I am to pray to Bibi Mariam [the Muslim name for the Virgin Mary], and I am a Sahib’ — he looked down at his boots ruefully. ‘No, I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?’ he considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, until his head swam. (117–18)

Kim’s confusion about whether he is a ‘sahib’ is explicitly presented in terms of religion. At the Catholic school to which he will be sent, he knows that he will be taught to pray to the Virgin Mary because he is a Sahib, but he immediately rejects both the Catholicism and his identity as English with the emphatic ‘no’. His equating of ‘Bibi Mariam’, the Muslim term, with the Virgin Mary suggests a rejection of the exclusivist claims of Catholic Christianity.

This scene is immediately succeeded by one in which Colonel Creighton talks to him at length and outlines his future as a ‘chain-man’, a surveyor and map-maker. Kim is at first wary and only becomes happy with the conversation when the Colonel speaks in ‘fluent and picturesque Urdu’ and Kim realises that Creighton respects the traditions and values of India; he does not have the ‘dull fat eyes of the other Sahibs’ (118). After the long conversation, Kim is reconciled to his future, but only because it allows him ‘to return to the road again’ (119). Kim consents to be educated as a Sahib, but refuses to embrace the identity of a Sahib, since he fully intends to return to his role as chela to the lama once his education is finished.

The second sounding of this question occurs during a conversation with the Muslim Mahbub Ali. Ali has advised him to hold on to his dual identity:

‘Among Sahibs, never forgetting that thou art a Sahib; among the folk of Hind, always remembering that thou art’ — he paused with a puzzled smile.

‘What am I? Mussalman [Muslim], Hindu, Jain or Buddhist? That is a hard nut’. (143)

Again, Kim presents the question of identity in religious terms. He wants to work out which religion he belongs to. Ali tells him that in terms of Islam he is an ‘unbeliever’ and therefore ‘damned’, but then goes on to express a belief in the relativity of all religions: ‘faiths are like the horses. Each has merit in its own country’. However

Kim rejects such relativism: ‘but my lama said altogether a different thing’. Ali’s rejoinder is that he is a ‘little angry’ that Kim should see ‘such worth in a man so little known’. Kim insists that he sees ‘that worth’ and ‘to him my heart is drawn’ (144). Kim feels a relationship of affection between himself and the lama and this feeling answers the question of what his religious identity consists in. Kipling is asserting the primacy of feeling in the religious life and also suggesting that the question of identity is not the real one: what is real is the bond of love between a disciple and his teacher. Kipling thus dramatizes the belief that abandonment of self is a precondition for the moral life, an idea common in Victorian times, but gives it force by emphasising the importance of letting go of the metaphysical idea of the immortal soul. It is not the subjugation of self implied by altruism, but rather the abandonment of the very idea of the self.

Kim again asks himself the question ‘Who is Kim — Kim — Kim?’ when he leaves school and rejoins the lama (185). This time the narrator suggests that the questioning is actually a form of meditation by linking what Kim says to eastern practice:

A very few white people, but many Asiatics, can throw themselves into a mazement as it were by repeating their own names over and over again to themselves, letting the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity. (185)

The archaic word ‘mazement’ means a stupor or trance, such as that produced in meditation by repeating a name over and over again, like a mantra. Such meditative practice was used by the ascetic holy man Purun Bhagat in Kipling’s earlier story (discussed in the next chapter) when Purun Bhagat repeated ‘a Name softly to himself a hundred hundred times, till, at each repetition, he seemed to move more and more out of his body’.⁶⁹ Purun Bhagat uses this practice to try to reach unity with the supreme Hindu god Brahm and has spent many months meditating in isolation. Kim, though, is a boy who has no experience of meditation and finds it impossible to contemplate the question of his own identity, and, by implication, the idea of anatta, or no permanent self:

⁶⁹ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Miracle of Purun Bhagat’, in *The Jungle Books*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 192–205 (p. 198).

In a minute — in another half second — he felt he would arrive at the solution of the tremendous puzzle; but here, as always happens, his mind dropped away from those heights with the rush of a wounded bird. (185)

Kim's mind is configured as a 'wounded bird' when he tries to understand the Buddhist doctrine of the absence of the soul, or the self. The full significance of this image becomes apparent later in the novel, when the lama likens his soul to a soaring eagle when it sees that there is 'no Teshoo Lama nor any other soul'. The lama has 'passed beyond the illusion of Time and Space and of Things', and the image of the eagle suggests majesty and triumph (288). Kim, however, is not yet at the stage of spiritual development when he can free himself from the idea of self or see the world as illusion and so he cannot 'soar', though the repetition of his name shows that he is beginning to understand the practice of meditation. The religious element of Kim's questioning and questing search for identity is underscored by the swift reaction of a Hindu priest who has been observing him: 'thou wast wondering there in thy spirit what manner of thing thy soul might be', he tells Kim (186). The Hindu priest does assume the existence of the soul, and his inclusion here emphasises the difference between Hindu and Buddhist concepts. In contrast to Buddhism, Hinduism believes that the soul of the individual, after countless rebirths, can achieve release (*moksha*) and be merged with the universal spirit Brahman. Buddhism, on the other hand, does not believe that there is an individual soul which persists through rebirths. The narrator uses the Hindu priest and his beliefs about the soul to show that Kim does not yet understand Buddhist beliefs: this understanding will come only with prolonged devotion to the lama and his way of life.

The Hindu priest asks Kim what his faith is, and Kim answers using 'one of the lama's pet words', that he is a 'seeker'. The Hindu priest tells him, 'it is a long road to the feet of the One; but thither do we all travel' (186). Just like Mahbub Ali, the Hindu priest expresses here a relativism about religion, that all religions are making the same journey. Again, Kim rejects such relativism by identifying himself with the lama's search, as is made clear immediately after this scene when he arrives at the Temple of the Tirthankers in Benares, where he hopes to meet the lama again. Now he identifies himself with no doubt or hesitation to a Hindu banker: 'I am *chela* to the Teshoo Lama, an Holy One from Bhoyital [Tibet]' (187). Kim then heals a sick child by giving it meat lozenges in milk to regain its strength, his first act of charity in imitation of the lama.

This episode indicates that Kim is now different from the boy who enjoyed his own capacity for cunning and deceit at the beginning of the novel. Formerly, Kim reflects, 'he would have made prompt profit on the situation and gone his way without a thought; but now, the very respect the Jat [a Hindu from the North] paid him proved he was a man' (187). He had wanted to return to the lama in disguise and gradually reveal himself, but now sees that these are 'boys' dreams' (188). The time for disguise is past. By healing the child, Kim identifies himself with the lama's loving-kindness, as the lama himself acknowledges, by saying, 'that was wisely done, O Friend of all the World'. In reply Kim explicitly devotes himself to the lama:

'I was made wise by thee, Holy One', said Kim, forgetting the little play just ended; forgetting St Xavier's; forgetting his white blood; forgetting even the Great Game as he stooped, Mohammedan fashion, to touch his master's feet in the dust of the Jain temple. 'My teaching I owe to thee. I have eaten thy bread three years. My time is finished. I am loosed from the schools. I come to thee'. (189)

Kim, the 'little friend of all the world', has so far been presented as a protean figure who can assume any disguise and pass as a member of any community in India. Now, however, in a Jain temple, having healed a Hindu child, and adopting the pose of a 'Mohammedan', he devotes himself to the Buddhist lama's service. In this way, the narrator indicates, Kim first uses and then discards other religious and cultural traditions in order to follow the lama and the Buddhist way. For Kim to understand religion fully it is necessary to him to follow one specific religious tradition.

So far Kim's crises of identity have been resolved by devoting himself to the way of the lama and practising compassion for others. His identity is performative in that he resolves the question of who he is by acting as the lama does. The narrator reinforces this idea by presenting Kim as adopting all the lama's ceremonial observances, at first 'mechanically' but then with delight:

So they enjoyed themselves in high felicity, abstaining, as the Rule demands, from evil words, covetous desires; not over-eating, not lying on high beds, nor wearing rich clothes. (213)

After their return from the Hills to the Plains, Kim enacts fully the role of the disciple:

He begged in the dawn, set blankets for the lama's meditation, held the weary head on his lap through the noonday heats, fanning away the flies till his wrists ached, begged again in the evenings, and rubbed the lama's feet, who rewarded him with promises of Freedom — today, tomorrow, or at furthest, the next day. (270)⁷⁰

The return to the Plains is a preparation for the key passages at the end of the novel in which Kim finds a kind of enlightenment. Worn out by his devotion to the lama, Kim suffers a breakdown, feeling that 'his soul was out of gear with its surroundings'. He repeats his name to himself, in an echo of his earlier attempts at meditation: 'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' (282). The Sahiba, who has looked after him, tells him that the lama has tumbled into a brook, but Kim does not as yet know about the lama's glimpse of Nirvana and so does not realise that this is the climax of the lama's search for the River of the Arrow.

Kim's thoughts as he enters a state of meditation are traced in detail. Firstly he tries to think about the lama and wonder why he has tumbled into a brook, but 'the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thought aside'. Kim realises that he is not capable of reasoning and linking thoughts together, and so he gazes at the trees, the fields, and the thatched huts hidden among the crops. He looks 'with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things — stared for a still half-hour'. He stares without feeling any connection with the outside world, and the narrator describes his soul as 'out of gear with its surroundings — a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner' (282).

The sugar-crusher lying useless in a corner of a field foregrounds an imperial reference not noted by critics: this machine was a British invention, an iron mill invented by the engineers Thomson and Mylne in 1873 to supersede the wooden mills used before this date. They introduced the iron sugar-crusher at their Beheea sugar-cane estate in the Bihar Province.⁷¹ The machine spread rapidly all over India and was successful in generating 'about 10 per cent more crystallisable sugar [...]

⁷⁰ The duties of a disciple are enumerated by the Buddha in many Buddhist texts.

⁷¹ M. S. Randhawa, *A History of Agriculture in India, III, 1757–1947* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 1983), p. 255.

than in the product made in the native mills'.⁷² The Beheea sugar-crusher is thus a Western innovation but the fact that the machine lies idle and inactive has significance: it suggests that the products of European technological ingenuity are of no use to Kim in his existential crisis. Without the lama present to guide him he feels no sense of any purpose and can configure his identity only in terms of abandoned machinery, an 'idle cog-wheel'. At this point he repeats the question 'what is Kim?' over and over again and starts to weep. This presages a moment of revelation:

He did not want to cry, — had never felt less like crying in his life, — but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. (282)

The 'audible click' calls to mind the 'self-registering turnstiles' of the Lahore Museum from the opening pages of the novel. The turnstiles admit entry to the visitor, and the reference here suggests that Kim is entering not a building but a new stage of life. One aspect of this new life is symbolised by Kim's tears, which call to mind an episode in the last of the stories in *The Second Jungle Book* (1895). Mowgli discovers that he is human and therefore must leave the jungle and his animal comrades. The narrator presents this as a painful moment for Mowgli:

'Hai mai, my brothers' cried Mowgli, throwing up his arms with a sob. 'I know not what I know. I would not go, but I am drawn by both feet. How shall I leave these nights?'⁷³

Bagheera, the leopard, then sends Mowgli on his way to 'a new trail' with the words, repeated twice, 'Remember Bagheera loved thee!' (342). Mowgli has outgrown the jungle and must join the human world as a man. He may have no contact with the animals again but the narrator stresses that he is left with the memory imprint of their love.

Similarly, Kim must proceed through a rite of passage that entails both loss and connection. Just as Mowgli must leave the jungle, so Kim must make his way in life without the lama. The weakness and feebleness of the lama is stressed in this final section of the novel, and it is made clear that he is an old man who will soon die. In both cases the young men must make their own way in life with the memory

⁷² John Augustus Voelcker, *Report on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1893), p. 251.

⁷³ Kipling, *The Jungle Books*, p. 341.

of the love that they have experienced. However Kim also becomes aware that he must let go the idea of self, as the description of his reconnection with the world makes clear:

Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true — solidly planted upon the feet — perfectly comprehensible — clay of his clay, neither more nor less. (282)

Kim has now understood the meaning of the Buddhist doctrine that there is no permanent self. The five-fold repetition of the passive tense (to be... to be...) is significant. Kim's re-connection with the material world is not described in terms of what he experiences as an individual subject with a fixed identity but as a set of experiences which are available to him. He has grasped the truth that identity is not fixed, and he has done so not through his intellect but through a moment of awareness as a result of meditation. The word 'clay' suggests not only that Kim is part of the world that he sees but also suggests that he is being re-created after his breakdown. There is an echo and subversion of the Genesis story of the creation of man, in which man (Adam, which means earth in Hebrew) is formed from clay. It is Buddhism, however, and not Christianity, that gives Kim a new life.

Indeed, the narrator uses explicit references to the Buddha's enlightenment in his description of Kim's epiphanic re-locking into the world. Kim lies down in the shade of a bullock-cart beside a 'young banian tree' and sleeps on the nurturing 'Mother Earth', 'his opened hands surrender[ing] to her strength' (283). In this way he is restored to health and, when he wakes, meets the lama once more and hears the story of the lama's enlightenment. In the fifth week after his enlightenment under the fig tree known subsequently as the 'bodhi' tree (tree of enlightenment), the Buddha was said to have spent time meditating under a nearby banyan tree. Kipling's reference to the 'banian tree' evokes the Buddha's story, embedding Kim's restoration to health within a Buddhist scenario of enlightenment.

My reading here follows Franklin in his interesting consideration of the Buddhist ideas in the novel. Kim's tears, for Franklin, constitute an 'insight, a realization, a change [...] Kim has realized that it does not matter who he is, since

there is no separate “Kim” to be, no self”.⁷⁴ Kim’s realization of the materiality of the world, in Franklin’s reading, is not a way of rejecting Buddhist spirituality in favour of Western activism but is an expression of the importance of mindfulness, of living in the present. As Franklin puts it, ‘when Kim sees that the elements of the material world all around him were “all real and true” [...] he is [...] recognising the givenness of each material moment and expressing a gratitude that is consistent with a Buddhist understanding of being fully in the present’ (ibid).

Franklin’s analysis is persuasive here, and supported by the text’s multiple Buddhist references. Besides the allusion to the ‘banian tree’ under which the Buddha meditated, which suggests that Kim has experienced his own sort of awakening or enlightenment, the reference to the bullock-cart under which Kim sleeps calls to mind the ‘Questions of Menander’, which uses the image of a cart, as discussed earlier. Kim is restored to health by letting go one of the key beliefs of Western individualism, the importance of the eternal self.

My reading here aims to correct the many critics who have interpreted this passage as Kim’s rejection of the way of the lama and his embrace of the Western creed of worldly activism, as suggested by the phrase ‘roads were meant to be walked on’. Such critics find a dichotomy between the experiences of Kim and the lama at the end of the novel and see *Kim* as asserting Western triumphalism. For instance, Laurie Hovell McMillin, noting the imagery of machinery, writes:

Kim’s secular revelation places him securely within both the things of this world and the colonialist machinery: he will work for the Raj, he will work in the world and for what seems to be the good of India [...] Kim’s epiphany is dramatized in the physical and active terms valorized by the novel [...] As newly made man of the world, and not the spirit, Kim can only understand the lama’s revelation in physical terms.⁷⁵

Kim, according to this view, is presented as choosing a life of action in colonialist India over the way of faith embodied by the lama. My reading is different: Kim, in understanding the importance of letting go of the notion of self, has fully entered the

⁷⁴ Franklin, *Lotus*, p. 175.

⁷⁵ Laurie Hovell McMillin, ‘Enlightenment Travels: the Making of Epiphany in Tibet’, in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. by James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 49–69 (pp. 60–61).

world of the lama, and resolved the difficulties he had previously felt over the question of his identity.

The importance of healing is indicated at the end of the novel by Kim's response to the lama's account of tumbling into the brook, which at first seems bathetic: 'Allah Karim! Wast thou very wet?' he asks (289). A common critical response is to interpret this remark as deliberately undercutting the lama's account of his enlightenment and thus privileging Kim's supposed rejection of the lama's spirituality in favour of the Great Game or Western activism generally. In fact, Harish Trivedi argues that because Kim uses the words 'Allah Karim' (a Muslim imprecation) in his question to the lama, Kim is 'giving a subconscious signal that the guide he will follow instead [of the lama] is Mahbub Ali'.⁷⁶ But the humour here serves a different function: it alerts the reader to the role of laughter in Kipling's work, which is often associated with healing, as J. M. S. Tompkins argues in her perceptive analysis of Kipling's writings.

Tompkins reads a little-known story of Kipling's written before *Kim*, 'The Legs of Sister Ursula' (1893), in terms of healing.⁷⁷ In this tale a rich man lies ill, depressed, and suicidal in his fifth-storey flat, nursed very dutifully by a young nun. As she goes to fetch some medicine the door of the apartment clicks shut, and she is forced to ascend to the flat via the fire-escape. She is glimpsed by an inhabitant of a flat below, Cott van Cott, who seeing her on the fire escape, believes there is a fire, and seizes his precious Stradivarius to follow her. Kipling leaves the reader to infer that with the wind that is blowing, the nun's legs are on full show to everyone, including the invalid. Helpless with laughter at the sight of Sister Ursula followed by Cott van Cott clutching his violin, the invalid decides not to commit suicide, saying 'the dear old world is just the same as ever [...] I'm going to get well, Sister Ursula'.

Laughter in this story is an instrument of healing and of restoration to a sound mind. As Tompkins puts it, 'Laughter [for Kipling] is also the solvent of despair and hatred. Its impact shivers the insubstantial, impassable wall of glass

⁷⁶ Harish Trivedi, 'Introduction', Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. xxix.

⁷⁷ The story was first published in the *San Francisco Examiner* on 4 June 1893 and, in the UK, in the *Idler Magazine* in June 1893 <<http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/ursula.htm>> [accessed 24 September 2014]

between the sufferer and the reality of life'.⁷⁸ It is a similar healing solvent that is suggested by Kim's remark, 'wast thou very wet?' Kim laughs with, not at, the lama. Laughter is a means of restoring Kim to health, and, certain of the love of the lama, Kim will live his life, whatever he does, in the knowledge of the Buddhist way. As Charles Allen asserts: 'the novel ends not with Kim torn between duty and faith, British India and Indian India, West and East, action and contemplation, but with Kim a committed disciple of a Tibetan Buddhist Lama'.⁷⁹ To clarify Allen's remark, it is not that Kim 'becomes' a Buddhist in the sense of entering a Buddhist monastery, but that whatever path Kim follows in the future, he will do so in the knowledge of what the lama has taught him.

Kim's moments of existential questioning, then, are resolved at the end of the novel in religious terms by his consciousness of the reality of the world and the lama's declaration of devoted love. Letting go of the notion of an essential self and its demands enables Kim to feel the bounty of the world and to understand the selflessness of the lama in postponing his enlightenment. In this way Kipling moves on from the restless and tormented Dick Heldar, an atom in a meaningless world who perceives religion as merely cruel and destructive.

***Kim*: a Counterfactual Idyll**

Finally, I explore the assumption that *Kim* is most important as a text when understood as overtly political, and should therefore be accounted a failure because Kipling does not give due to Indian aspirations to independence and the historical realities of the British Raj. John McClure speaks for many critics when he writes: 'what Kipling excludes, ultimately, is history, the vital forces changing Indian society. He does so by focusing on either side of the historical process, on the plenitude of the moment and the finality of the eternal'.⁸⁰ The most influential proponent of this view is Edward Said, who calls *Kim* a 'profoundly embarrassing novel', in that it nowhere challenges the rule of the British Raj over India.⁸¹ It is true

⁷⁸ Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 52.

⁷⁹ Charles Allen, *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Abacus, 2008), p. 362.

⁸⁰ John McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: the Colonial Fiction* in Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Zohreh T. Sullivan (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 375–84 (p. 383).

⁸¹ Edward Said, 'Introduction', Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 45.

that Kipling does not deal with the forces of history, but the further question to be asked is whether this stance renders the author culpable of deliberate ignorance and the novel guilty of collusion with colonialism, a charge often made against Kipling, implicitly or explicitly. Edmund Wilson was one of the earliest critics to accuse Kipling of evasion of historical realities:

What the reader comes to expect is that Kim will come eventually to realise that he is delivering into bondage to the British invaders those whom he has always considered his own people, and that a struggle between allegiances will result [...] But the parallel lines never meet; the alternating attractions felt by Kim never give rise to a genuine struggle [...] The fiction of Kipling, then, does not dramatise any fundamental conflict because Kipling would never face one.⁸²

It is true that *Kim* is not a novel about the historical or political realities of life in India under the British Raj, but I do not follow Wilson in attributing this to Kipling's psychological makeup. Rather, in its generously inclusive vision of a land that tolerates all faiths, the novel is profitably read as a utopia or vision, as David Sergeant argues:

Kim is the vision of an empire that never was, an empire that never could be. This need not, however, invalidate it. [...] If visions and utopias do not aspire to reality, they can point to some of the things in which reality is deficient. In Kipling's case, in *Kim*, this includes tolerance, imagination, good humour, generosity, kindness.⁸³

Sergeant's reading is suggestive, but his listing of the values which *Kim* endorses fails to put these into a religious context, and generally he gives insufficient weight to the Buddhist ideas in the novel. If we do pay close attention to these ideas we can then categorise *Kim* as a religious novel which gives imaginative expression to important Buddhist concepts, countering prevailing negative Western constructions. *Kim* is a vision of a land in which religious harmony prevails, a harmony which is only disrupted by the presence of intolerant Western Christian chaplains. It is true that Kipling is a diverse and complex writer who elsewhere deals directly with the anxieties and conflicts of empire, as in his stories 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (1885) and 'The Bridge Builders' (1893). However *Kim* foregrounds religious

⁸² Edmund Wilson, 'The Kipling that Nobody Read', in *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford, pp.17–69 (pp. 30, 32). The essay was first published in *Atlantic Monthly*, 107 (1941), 201–14.

⁸³ David Sergeant, *Kipling's Art of Fiction, 1884–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 204.

rather than political themes, and in my view is not served by being analysed exclusively in relation to the latter. Rather, the novel's ending, which reaches a climax with the lama revealing himself to be a true bodhisattva and Kim restored to full emotional and physical health, makes full sense only when seen in terms of its religious ideas.

This reading counters much recent criticism which has been dominated by post-colonialist concerns and gives little if any weight to the Buddhist ideas engaged with in the work. The novel's close, where the final words are given to the lama and no reaction from Kim is recorded, has proved troubling for critics, who are perplexed about what happens to Kim at the end of the novel: does he rejoin the Great Game or not? One critical strategy thus consists in concentrating on what is omitted from the novel, on the grounds that Kipling's supposed evasions are deeply significant. For instance, Zohreh T. Sullivan writes of the ending:

The novel's scene of closure appears to transcend the issues of identity and origins raised at each stage of Kim's initiation to the colonial order he inherits from his father. The last words of the novel belong not to Kim but to the lama. And it is this final evasion that gives me the greatest problems as a reader.⁸⁴

But this is surely an evasion on the part of the critic, who does not pay attention to the text and the importance of the lama and his quest. Sullivan's assumption here that the final words of the novel should have been given to Kim misses the point that the novel comes to a climax with the lama's vision of Nirvana and his postponement of that state through his love for Kim. The 'evasion' is linked to an attitude that has bedevilled much analysis of *Kim* in the recent past, namely the critic's conscious or unconscious assertion that Kipling really ought to have written a different type of novel, one that gave full weight to Indian aspirations to independence and presented the historical realities of the British Raj. As David Sergeant argues, these critical stances point to a fundamental misunderstanding of the novel's purpose:

Caught up in this attitude is a basic mistrust of the fictive. The everywhere implicit justification for portraying Kipling as using devices

⁸⁴ Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 177. Also quoted in Sergeant, *Kipling's Art of Fiction*, p. 193.

and stratagems, as nudging and arranging and engineering, is that he is not being historically accurate.⁸⁵

I agree with Sergeant's assumption that we should see the novel as fiction, rather than as a work that deals with historical contingencies. However I also want to emphasise that Kipling roots *Kim* in religious ideas and concepts that were being actively discussed at the time, and that a knowledge of these ideas enhances our understanding of the novel's working and its power. As Clara Claiborne Park suggests, 'the metaphysical and religious questions integral to the relationship of Kim and Teshoo Lama' are treated with 'full seriousness' in the novel.⁸⁶ Against the background of an almost universal mistrust of particular Buddhist concepts, such as Nirvana and the lack of a stable self, Kipling presents a deeply felt imaginative rendering of what the path to enlightenment might be like, both for a future bodhisattva and his chela. In the final chapter, therefore, I explore the significance of the lama and his search.

⁸⁵ Sergeant, *Kipling's Art of Fiction*, p. 194.

⁸⁶ Clara Claiborne Park, 'The River and the Road: Fashions in Forgiveness', *The American Scholar*, 66 (1997), 43–62 (p. 60).

Chapter 4

The Lama and his Search for Enlightenment

The lama in *Kim* has often been dismissed or ignored by critics, who characterise him variously as ‘a hero of passivity’, with an ‘atrophied absence of adulthood’ or even ‘selfish’.¹ Edward Said does concede that ‘we never doubt the lama’s piety’ but his verdict on the lama’s attempts to explain his vision of Nirvana is that ‘there is some mumbo-jumbo in this, of course, but it shouldn’t all be dismissed’.² The words ‘of course’ and the assumption by Said that most of what the lama says should be dismissed is an example of what David Sergeant has rightly called ‘unexamined secular prejudices’ on the part of many of the commentators on the novel, who do not take seriously the religious ideas in *Kim*.³ A more recent edition of the novel edited by the Indian scholar Harish Trivedi does at first sight promise to attach more importance to the lama: he writes of ‘the parallel quests’ of the lama and Kim and gives some background to the lama’s search for the River of the Arrow, which most critics ignore. However, having made the astute observation that the river is found ‘not so much with his [the lama’s] eye as with his soul’, Trivedi then comes to the conclusion not that the river has a religious and symbolic importance but that ‘the lama is made to look obsessive in his private quest’ and ‘even comical in his quixotic venture’, reiterating a common view that the lama is largely a figure of fun.⁴

This chapter argues against these readings that the lama is not a comical figure but is a means for Kipling to explore ideas of religious faith, devotion, manliness, and love in the context of an idealised India. Further, by constructing the lama in terms of the Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva, the figure who postpones Nirvana for the sake of others, Kipling uses and refines ideas that were known in Victorian culture but often perceived as unacceptably alien in order to explore ideas

¹ Judgements found respectively in Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 271; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of British India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 117; Alan Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 97.

² Edward Said, ‘Introduction’, Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 15, 19.

³ David Sergeant, *Kipling’s Art of Fiction, 1884–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 163.

⁴ Harish Trivedi, ‘Introduction’, Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. xxiii, xxviii.

of what a truly good and holy man could be like. Many writers in the nineteenth century interpreted Nirvana as entailing extinction of the human being and this led to Buddhism being characterised as pessimistic, atheistic, and nihilistic. *Kim*, on the other hand, presents the lama's experience of Nirvana not as extinction but as a joyful, visionary experience intimately connected with the experience of love for another. The pessimism that was often connected with Buddhism is replaced by a life-affirming optimism.

It is not that Kipling is unaware of the philosophy of pessimism that characterises the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, he gives it literary expression in his novel *The Light that Failed* (1890), which is influenced by James Thomson's poem of despair, *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874), read by Kipling at school. The pessimism of *The Light that Failed* is in marked contrast to the optimistic world-vision of *Kim*. Some of the reasons for this change are Kipling's increasing respect for Eastern spirituality as seen in his story 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat', his experience of joyful fatherhood which led him to reconsider the nature of manliness, and his close association with his father during the writing of *Kim* which helped to assuage the feelings of abandonment that he had felt when left as a child in Southsea. To situate these latter developments more fully, I start by considering Kipling's presentation of philosophical despair in *The Light that Failed* and the link between ideas of Nirvana and the concept of pessimism in Victorian culture.

Nirvana, Pessimism, and *The City of Dreadful Night*

In his portrayal of the lama's vision at the end of *Kim* and his decision to postpone his own enlightenment for the sake of his disciple Kim, Kipling is challenging nineteenth-century ideas about Nirvana. Victorian writings show that this concept was considered to be incomprehensible at best, and threatening and perverse at worst.⁵ As Philip C. Almond says, 'Of all the aspects of Buddhist doctrine with which the Victorians dealt, the question of the nature of Nirvana aroused the most interest and the most controversy'.⁶ Many commentators believed that Nirvana was

⁵ See Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) for a full discussion of Western interpretations of Nirvana.

⁶ Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 102.

equivalent to the extinction of the individual. In this interpretation, the attainment of Nirvana was often likened to the flame of a candle being blown out or a fire being extinguished, following the literal derivation of the word. The first prominent Buddhist scholar in the West, Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), was influential in promulgating this view:

It is to a fire which is extinguished that one compares the Nirvana to which one says that a Buddha attains when he dies, thus freeing him from the ties of this world.⁷

This derivation of Nirvana as an extinguished fire supported the presentation of Buddhism as a religion of passivity and pessimism which aimed at the extinction of the individual, and it was believed that the aim of a Buddhist in life was to do nothing and to feel nothing, to prepare for this ultimate final stage. Buddhism therefore became readily characterised as a kind of nihilism, a philosophy that was well known in Victorian culture largely through the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).⁸ (Schopenhauer was widely read in Buddhism, citing in his various writings at least twenty-six separate works on the religion with which he was familiar.)⁹ Exemplary of this characterization is the American Transcendentalist James Freeman Clarke (1810–1888) who in *Ten Great Religions*, first published in 1871, writes: ‘nihilism arrives sooner or later. God is nothing; man is nothing; life is nothing; death is nothing; eternity is nothing. Hence the profound sadness of Buddhism’.¹⁰ As the modern writer Roger-Pol Droit puts it, Buddhism was seen by

⁷ Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction to Indian Buddhism*, p. 526, quoted in Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana*, p. 61.

⁸ The term ‘nihilism’ was first coined by the German philosopher Friedrich Jacobi to critique Kant’s transcendental idealism. It was popularised by Ivan Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and then became identified with Russian revolutionary movements that rejected the authority of the state, church and family. The anarchist Mikhael Bakunin (1814–1876) was especially identified with these ideas.

⁹ Schopenhauer’s major contribution to philosophy, his impact on nineteenth-century thought and his connection with Buddhist ideas has been explored extensively by critics. See, for example, Dorothea W. Dauer, *Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1969); Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. by Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. by Bart Vandenabeele (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Peter Abelsen, ‘Schopenhauer and Buddhism’, *Philosophy East and West*, 43 (1993), 255–78. Most of his reading in Buddhism was done in English: see Patrick Bridgwater, *Arthur Schopenhauer’s English Schooling* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 370.

¹⁰ James Freeman Clarke, *Ten Great Religions: a Comparison of All Religions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1880), I, p. 166.

many in the nineteenth century as a ‘bad dream’, ‘a paradoxical and horrible religion of nothingness’.¹¹

Further, Buddhism became identified with the philosophy of pessimism, again influenced by the writings of Schopenhauer, works which became better known in England as the century progressed.¹² The increasing link made between Buddhism and ideas of nihilism and pessimism can be directly attributed to his influence. This shift is suggested, for instance, by comparing one of the earliest accounts of Buddhism in the *Westminster Review* of 1856 with later discussions. The essay, entitled ‘Buddhism: Mythical and Historical’, concentrates on what can be discovered about the origins and teaching of the religion from the texts currently being translated and makes no mention whatsoever of a connection between Buddhism and nihilism or pessimism.¹³ However by 1879, the philosopher William Wallace (1844–1897), author of the entry on pessimism in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, explicitly links Buddhist ideas with pessimism, characterising the first noble truth, about the fact of suffering, in the following way: ‘that all life is pain is the one perpetual refrain of the Buddhist: search for pleasure is vain and ends in increased misery’.¹⁴ The longing for extinction through Nirvana was linked to the fact of suffering in the world and seen as a logical response.

One reason for the characterisation of Nirvana in this way was that it coincided with a serious philosophical debate about the causes of and justification for suicide towards the end of the century. This is well documented by Barbara T.

¹¹ Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: the Philosophers and the Buddha*, tr. by David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 4.

¹² The first sustained discussion of Schopenhauer’s ideas was in 1853. His ideas became well-known following translation of his most important work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, which was first published in Germany in 1818/19. [John Oxenford], ‘Iconoclasm in German Philosophy’, *Westminster Review*, 59 (1853), 388–407; Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, tr. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1883–1886). The explosion of interest in the work of Schopenhauer can be seen in the fact that 235 articles on his pessimistic philosophy were published in Britain and America between 1871 and 1900. See Ralph Goodale, ‘Schopenhauer and Pessimism in Nineteenth-Century English Literature’, *PMLA*, 47 (1932), 241–61 (p. 241, note 3).

¹³ [Anon], ‘Buddhism: Mythical and Historical’, *Westminster Review*, 66 (1856), 296–331.

¹⁴ William Wallace, ‘Pessimism’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th edition, ed. by T. S. Baynes and William Robertson Smith (Edinburgh: Black, 1875–1879), 25 vols, XVIII, pp. 684–91 (p. 685).

Gates in her book *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories*.¹⁵ Suicide as a rational act which follows logically from a philosophy of pessimism is discussed by both Schopenhauer and his follower Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906). Schopenhauer does not openly advocate that an individual should commit suicide, but nor does he believe in any religious prohibition against the act. Von Hartmann, however, comes very close to advocating universal suicide, as Frederick Copleston makes clear in his discussion of the philosopher:

Von Hartmann looks forward to a time when the human race in general will have so developed its consciousness of the real state of affairs that a cosmic suicide will take place [...] What is needed is the greatest possible development of consciousness, so that in the end humanity may understand the folly of volition, commit suicide and, with its own destruction, bring the world process to an end.¹⁶

This kind of discussion about philosophical pessimism and the desirability of suicide forms one important intellectual context to writings about Buddhism in the later nineteenth century. The Scottish economist R. H. Patterson (1821–1886) is one amongst a number of writers who links all these ideas together:

Pessimism has of late years come into sad vogue throughout the European world. The strange, dismal doctrine of Schopenhauer seems at length to have found a congenial soil on this side of the British Channel; and the question, ‘Is life worth living?’ is being seriously discussed amongst us [...] The plain reading of Buddha’s ‘way of salvation’ from the miseries of existence implies absolute annihilation.¹⁷

Such a conceptualisation of Buddhist ideas as necessarily entailing pessimist beliefs makes use of an understanding of pessimism that became more pronounced as the nineteenth century progressed. There is no doubt that many *fin-de-siècle* attitudes can be seen as indicating a despair about the world which may be traced broadly to the decline in religious certainties, the latent cruelty of the struggle for existence in the natural world, the feeling that the universe itself was on a downward course following the discovery of the second law of thermodynamics, and the social effects

¹⁵ Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). The most famous, or notorious, expression of the ‘coming universal wish not to live’ in the literature of the 1890s is of course Father Time in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), who kills his siblings and then himself.

¹⁶ Frederick Copleston, *18th and 19th Century German Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 1963), p. 291.

¹⁷ R. H. Patterson, ‘Pessimism and its Religions’, *British Quarterly Review*, 164 (1885), 385–414 (pp. 385, 411).

of the industrial revolution and urbanization.¹⁸ Max Nordau's sensational work *Degeneration* (1895) postulated both racial and cultural decline, characterizing the age as a 'Dusk of nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is persisting in the midst of a dying world'.¹⁹ Linked with this type of articulated belief in a cosmic decline was a philosophical position that has been described by the modern writer Joshua Foa Dienstag as 'metaphysical pessimism' and again is exemplified most clearly in the writings of Schopenhauer.²⁰ Dienstag characterises pessimism broadly as the belief that 'time is a burden; that the course of history is in some sense ironic; that freedom and happiness is incompatible, and that human existence is absurd'.²¹ The philosopher J. Radford Thomson in 1885 defines philosophical pessimism in the following way:

[It] is the doctrine that this world is the worst of all possible worlds; that human life is of necessity evil, abounding in sufferings which more than counterbalance its pleasures; that there is no prospect of a radical amelioration of man's lot; that non-existence is better than existence, and that the only tolerable prospect before us is the prospect of annihilation.²²

This set of beliefs might also be termed 'cosmological pessimism' since they are ideas about the world in its entirety. Although these ideas are present in some form throughout western culture and can be traced back to Greek philosophy and the Hebrew prophet Ecclesiastes, it was Schopenhauer, von Hartmann and the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) who were most closely associated with a philosophy of pessimism in the nineteenth century.²³ Leopardi, who was often

¹⁸ For a discussion of the causes of this kind of pessimistic feeling at the end of the nineteenth century see, for example, Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: a Cultural History* (London: Norton, 1992), pp. xii–xiii. For the causes of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism in France see Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880–1900*, tr. by Derek Coltman (London: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹⁹ Quoted in *The Fin de Siècle: a Reader in Cultural History c. 1880–1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xiii.

²⁰ The word 'pessimism' was coined by Jesuit priests in response to Voltaire's satire *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (1759) and first brought into English culture by Coleridge. For Coleridge's use of the word see *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 742.

²¹ Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 19.

²² J. Radford Thomson, 'Three Theories of Life: Utilitarianism, Pessimism, Christianity', *British Quarterly Review*, 81 (1885), 25–46 (p. 32).

²³ Nietzsche traced the philosophy of pessimism back to Anaximander. See Dale Wilkerson, *Nietzsche and the Greeks* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 129. For the explicit linking of Ecclesiastes, pessimism and Buddhist ideas, see Charles Wright, *The Book of*

bracketed with Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann in discussions of pessimism, had become known in English culture following a critical appraisal in the *Westminster Review* in 1837 by Giuseppe Manzini. This was followed by (anonymous) articles by two of the giants of Victorian intellectual life, George Henry Lewes in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1848 and William Gladstone in the *Quarterly Review* in 1850.²⁴ Leopardi became known as 'a spokesman for pessimism'.²⁵ Thirty years later Matthew Arnold again brought Leopardi into public view by comparing the Italian poet to Wordsworth and Byron, asserting that Leopardi 'has a far wider culture than Wordsworth, more mental lucidity [...]. Above all this Italian [...] is far more of the artist'.²⁶

While it is unclear whether Kipling had read Schopenhauer he certainly knew of Leopardi and his philosophy. In 'The Last of the Stories' (1888), written when he was still in India, Kipling creates the character of the 'Devil of Discontent', who takes the narrator on a tour of limbo, where he encounters all the characters in fiction, including those from his, Kipling's, own stories. 'You have no jurisdiction over the dead', the narrator tells the Devil of Discontent, to which the Devil replies with the oath 'Sainted Leopardi!'²⁷ The sense is that Leopardi's gloom and despair make him an appropriate 'saint' for the Devil. Whether Kipling had actually read Leopardi or just knew of him by reputation is unclear, but he certainly knew of Leopardi's reputation as a philosopher of pessimism.

Kipling also came across Leopardi's philosophy in one of the bleakest poems written in the nineteenth century, James Thomson's famously pessimistic *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874). Thomson (1834–1882), who wrote under the initials B. V., became associated with the well-known atheist and reformer Charles Bradlaugh

Koheleth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883). For an early review of Leopardi see [Anon], *Quarterly Review*, 86 (1850), 295–336. A general discussion of pessimism and its use in popular culture of the later nineteenth century is to be found in Nicholas Shrimpton, "'Lane, You're a Perfect Pessimist': Pessimism and the English Fin de Siècle", *Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (2007), 41–57.

²⁴ See Ottavio M. Casale and Allan C. Dooley, 'Leopardi, Arnold, and the Victorian Sensibility', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 17 (1980), 44–65, for an analysis of these articles.

²⁵ Casale and Dooley, 'Leopardi', p. 54.

²⁶ Matthew Arnold, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. by R. H. Super (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1973), p. 230.

²⁷ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Last of the Stories' in *Abaft the Funnel* (New York: Doubleday, 1909), pp. 297–323 (p. 298). The story was first published in *The Week's News*, Allahabad, 15 September, 1888.

whom he assisted with his periodical *The National Reformer*, in which *The City of Dreadful Night* was published in 1874.²⁸ Kipling writes in his autobiography that the poem made a tremendous impact on him when he read it as a teenager: it ‘shook me to my unformed core’.²⁹ The poem was dedicated to ‘the younger brother of Dante — Giacomo Leopardi’, who, as I have indicated, was well-known in Victorian culture, and is Thomson’s vivid imagining of Leopardi’s world of despair. An example of the Italian poet’s pessimism can be seen in a letter he wrote in 1820:

For this is the miserable condition of man, and the barbarous teaching of reason, that, our pleasures and pains being mere illusions, the affliction which derives from the certitude of the nullity of all things is evermore and solely just and real.³⁰

To this, according to Lyman Cotton, Leopardi adds the paradox which he calls ‘universal truth’ and which represents the summation of his mystical insight: ‘*tutto è nulla*’.³¹ Nothing has any worth or value.

Such pessimism is reflected in *The City of Dreadful Night*. The city concerned is London, and the poet/narrator wanders mournfully through the dead city which serves as a fitting *locus* for his despair:

The City’s atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.³²

The despair, sadness and madness referred to in this passage result from the city being a place of ‘dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope’ (10). The poet wanders throughout the ‘dark and dense’ city, beginning at the centre by the river, moving northwards to the suburbs and finally ending up by the plateau overlooking the city

²⁸ Biographical information from Kenneth Hugh Byron, *The Pessimism of James Thomson (B.V.) in Relation to his Times* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

²⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: for my Friends Known and Unknown* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 29.

³⁰ Lyman A. Cotton, ‘Leopardi and “The City of Dreadful Night”’, *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 675–89 (p. 679).

³¹ Cotton, ‘Leopardi’, p. 680.

³² James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and other Poems* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880), pp. 39–40. Further references are given in the text.

on which rests the image portrayed in Dürer's famous engraving *Melencolia* (1514). The figure of Melencolia was intended by Thomson to provide a summation of his themes, as is shown by a letter he wrote to George Eliot: 'that grand and awful Melancholy of Albert Dürer which dominates the City of my poem'.³³ Melencolia, a parody of the divine female figure, sits high over the City on a plateau. By measuring time and space, she sees everything in terms of their unique and isolated qualities. Every inhabitant described in *The City of Dreadful Night* is created in Melencolia's image: she is a bronze statue and therefore cannot act, but she has eternal consciousness nonetheless. As the poet contemplates the Melencolia, he realises that the only way he can escape the despair that she embodies is by death. The final stanza portrays the moon and stars circling around the figure, as if she is the most powerful force in the Universe. The people of London are her 'subjects' who often gaze up at her:

The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair. (55)

All see Melencolia as an emblem of despair. The weak are terrified by this thought; the strong can only resolve to endure.

Thus, for Thomson, the despair and futility inherent in living is intensified by consciousness. The final section of the poem shows the ideas about life that the poet wishes to express through the figure of the Melencolia:

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
That all is vanity and nothingness. (54-55)

There is no after-life to reward human endeavour; no oracle has any truth to express; there is no veil of meaning to be revealed; just as Ecclesiastes asserted

³³ Quoted in Peter C. Noel-Bentley, "'Fronting the Dreadful Mysteries of Time": Dürer's *Melencolia* in Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*', *Victorian Poetry*, 12 (1974), 193–203 (p. 193).

centuries ago, ‘all is vanity’ in the sense that all is nothingness. The only thing that Melencolia does pass on to her subjects is an indomitable will.

This is the philosophy of pessimism that lies behind *The Light that Failed*. The protagonist, Dick Heldar, is isolated and lonely as he struggles to make a living through his art. He is unable to form relationships with women because of his desire to control them. As Phillip Mallet asserts, ‘for a man to love a woman, in this novel, is to be humiliated, and to deserve humiliation’.³⁴ Dick’s childhood companion, Maisie, does not reciprocate his feelings of love and rejects him in favour of a life studying art in Paris, and companionship with another woman. Kipling makes deliberate use of Thomson’s poem by including it as a text that inspires Maisie and her unnamed female friend. Maisie wishes to paint her own version of Dürer’s engraving, and Dick, motivated by contempt, decides that he can create a better version, which he considers his masterpiece. Unbeknown to him, his *Melancolia* is destroyed by the prostitute Bessie in a jealous rage and his sight gradually deteriorates and is lost because of an old war wound.³⁵ When Maisie refuses to return to look after him he sinks into a state of neglect, depression and misery which finally culminates in his suicide in the Sudan.³⁶ The blindness that destroys him is symptomatic of his inability to connect in any other way with the world, echoing the misery and isolation portrayed in Thomson’s poem.

The city Kipling presents is a world of despair, again reflecting Thomson’s setting. It fosters and reflects Dick’s alienation. It is a place of poverty, darkness and fog, often described as ‘yellow fog’.³⁷ The fog symbolises not only moral blindness but also, because of its unpleasant yellow colour, pollution. The city is crowded, dark, and noisy, made up of ‘packed houses’, ‘long lightless streets’, and an ‘appalling rush of traffic’. The chimneys are described as ‘crooked crows that looked like sitting cats as they swung around’, the metaphor conveying a powerful sense of

³⁴ Phillip Mallett, ‘Masculinity, Imperialism and the Novel’, in *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity*, ed. by Philip Mallett, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 151–71 (p. 161).

³⁵ Kipling modernised the spelling of Melencolia.

³⁶ There are two endings to *The Light that Failed*. One culminates in Dick’s suicide, the other sees Dick and Maisie happily reunited. Since Kipling wrote of the first ending, ‘This is the story of the *The Light that Failed* as it was originally conceived by the Writer’ (Preface), I assume that this was indeed the ending that he intended.

³⁷ Rudyard Kipling, *The Light that Failed* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 41. Further references are given in the text.

unease and instability (99). London is a place of pettiness and meanness, where Dick nearly starves from lack of money, and no one can communicate: ‘Who’s the man that says we’re all islands shouting to each other across seas of misunderstanding?’ Dick asks bitterly (59).³⁸ The people have ‘death written on their features’ (45). It is a place of ‘the sordid misery of want’ (85) and ‘hideous turmoil’ (88). It is constantly described as a place of darkness, and, when Dick becomes blind, his inner darkness mirrors the outer darkness of his environment. He is looked after by Mr and Mrs Beeton and their son Alfred, who steal from him and neglect him. His hope that Bessie might take care of him is dashed when she discloses that she has ruined his painting. The only gesture of defiance and self-assertion that Dick can make against malignant fate, as I have said, is to destroy himself.

In this world of despair the only moments of happiness that Dick feels are in the company of his fellow war-artists, Torpenhow and the Nilgai, encounters described as ‘the austere love that springs up between men who have tugged the same oar together and are yoked by custom and use and the intimacies of toil’(58). Torpenhow even acts like the mother that Dick has never had, fussing over him, looking after him when he has a panic attack, and finally cradling Dick’s dying body in his arms. But ultimately even the solidarity of male companionship cannot save Dick from despair.

The pessimism of *The Light that Failed* has often alienated readers, who have been repelled by the novel’s apparent misogyny and self-pity, as I discussed in Chapter 3. In tone and atmosphere the novel strikingly contrasts with *Kim*, published only ten years later. Whereas the earlier novel presents human beings as selfish and isolated and suicide as the only rational outcome of a life of misery, *Kim* shows a joyous, colourful world in which friendship and the moral search have meaning and the aim of life is to realise enlightenment, characterised in terms of love for others. Thus, whether consciously or not, *The Light that Failed* reflects prevailing views of Buddhism as a nihilistic, pessimistic religion and Nirvana as extinction, while *Kim* presents the religion as joyous and life-affirming, countering the dominant characterisation of Buddhism at the time that Kipling was writing.

³⁸ This reference has not been traced. It may be Kipling’s satirical inversion of Donne’s famous statement about no man being an island.

Before exploring this transformed positive view of Buddhism in *Kim*, I turn to a consideration of the reasons for this change in Kipling's thinking during the decade that separates the two novels. What happened that enabled Kipling to imagine the joyous relationship between a Buddhist priest and his disciple, so different from the self-serving attitudes of the characters in the earlier novel? One part of the answer is Kipling's increasing interest in Eastern spirituality during the 1890s.

Imagining the life of a Hindu ascetic

The only short story by Kipling that deals wholly with Eastern spirituality is 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat', written in 1894. Imagining the stages of life for a devout Hindu, Kipling explores some of the apparent tensions in Eastern religion, between love for others and individual spiritual fulfilment, and between action and contemplation. Angus Wilson has described the story as 'a curtain-raiser to *Kim*' in that 'the Lama's Wheel and the Great Game (East and West) meet in one man', since the protagonist, Purun Bhagat, has led an active life in politics before becoming a spiritual seeker. However, rather than pursuing the link between the story and the novel, much critical response to the tale has concentrated on an assumed dichotomy between a life of public service and the spiritual life of a religious hermit and assumed that Kipling is privileging Western action over Eastern contemplation. Wilson himself asserts that the story is 'a tribute to the Western code of action rather than to the Hindu way of passivity'.³⁹ An exploration of the religious context of the story enables a different and more nuanced interpretation, namely that Kipling is not setting East and West in opposition but instead aiming to resolve or dissolve these constructed tensions and conflicts between a Western materialist outlook and Eastern spirituality. In the process Kipling presents an entirely favourable view of a holy man in India, a forerunner to his portrait of the lama.

'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' was written in May 1894 while Kipling was on holiday in Wiltshire, staying with his parents who had returned from India. It was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Pall Mall Budget* on 18 October 1894, with the title 'A Miracle of the Present Day', and collected in *The Second Jungle*

³⁹ Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Granada, 1979), p. 171.

Book in 1895 with the present title.⁴⁰ The story dramatises a basic Hindu belief, found in ancient texts, that there are four stages of life and that the proper way for a man to conduct the final stage is to give up all possessions and become a sunnyasi, or spiritual seeker. In this last stage of life, according to the description in the authoritative ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a man should live in total solitude at the foot of a tree and spend his time meditating on the supreme divinity, Brahm. Once a day he may go to the nearby village to beg a little food. Ever pure of mind, he should bide his time ‘until at last his soul is freed from its fetters and absorbed in the eternal spirit, the impersonal self-existence Brahm’. In this way he will achieve release from the cycle of rebirth.⁴¹

The story concerns a high-caste Brahmin, Purun Dass, who has risen to become the Prime Minister of one of the semi-independent native states. His reforms are approved by the colonial English administrators, and he is made a Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. At the peak of his career, he does something ‘no Englishman would think of doing’: he returns the order of knighthood, resigns his position, and becomes a sunnyasi, or ascetic (194). He travels to the high Himalayas, meeting Tibetan herdsmen and lamas on the road, until he reaches a deserted shrine high above a mountain village, where he makes his home. ‘He had come to the place appointed for him — the silence and the space’ (198). He calls himself Purun Bhagat [the holy man]. He practises meditation: ‘he would repeat a Name softly to himself a hundred hundred times, till, at each repetition, he seemed to move more and more out of his body, sweeping up to the doors of some tremendous discovery; but, just as the door was opening, his body would drag him back’ (198). Purun Bhagat, through solitude and constant meditation, is seeking union with Brahm.

The narrative goes on to explore the nature of miracle. For many years Purun Bhagat remains in the shrine, fed by the devout villagers who respect him. He gains a reputation as a miracle-worker because the animals treat him as one of their own. This affinity with animals results from the way that Purun Bhagat in turn treats them with respect: he keeps still, never makes a hasty movement, and never looks directly

⁴⁰ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Miracle of Purun Bhagat’, in *The Jungle Books*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 192–205. Further references are given in the text.

⁴¹ Julius Eggeling, ‘Brahmanism’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th edn, ed. by T. S. Baynes and William Robertson Smith (Edinburgh: Black, 1875–1879), 25 vols, IV, pp. 201–11 (p. 206).

at an animal. The narrator comments that the holy man ‘believed that all things were one big Miracle’ (201). In other words, Purun Bhagat has a Hindu rather than a Christian view of miracle: he sees the whole of life and the natural world as a miraculous act of creation, and he does not believe in particular ‘miracles’ which (in traditional Christian thought) transgress natural laws.

The story culminates in a crisis for the village. Following weeks of rain, the mountain on which Purun Bhagat’s shrine is based becomes unstable, threatening a land-slip which will obliterate the village below. The wild animals wake Purun Bhagat during the night, and he hastens down to warn the villagers. Using his acquired authority he leads the villagers to safety but in the attempt dies, assuming in death the physical position appropriate to a sunnyasi. The villagers build a shrine in his honour but they never find out what he was in his former life. The reader, however, is well aware that Purun Bhagat’s powers of leadership, as well as his empathy with the wild animals, have enabled him to save the village.

This ‘superbly designed, tightly written, and dexterously controlled’ tale is commonly considered ‘a masterpiece of Kipling’s art’.⁴² What is remarkable about this story, besides the beauty and simplicity of its prose, is Kipling’s absolute seriousness of tone. Unlike many of his earlier Indian stories such as ‘False Dawn’ (1888), there is no frame narrator to impose distance and an ironical perspective to events. To nineteenth-century Western readers who were largely dismissive of Hindu beliefs Kipling presents a deeply sympathetic portrait of a man who has achieved worldly success but who renounces the world to seek release from rebirth and absorption into the divine.

However, like Angus Wilson, most critics interpret the ending of the story as privileging English activism against supposed Hindu passivity, a reading that assumes a reductionist view of Hinduism and its spirituality, a common trope in Victorian and indeed modern writings about Hinduism. The view that Hindu spirituality precludes acting with compassion in the world is based upon a curious assumption about what it is to seek holiness for a Hindu, as Indian critics have noted. K. C. Belliappa, for instance, comments: ‘in the Hindu view of life, action and

⁴² Vasant A. Shahane, *Rudyard Kipling: Activist and Artist* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1973), p. 88.

contemplation are mutually inclusive'.⁴³ D. C. R. A. Goontellike underlines the same point: 'action and contemplation need not be opposites. They are integral aspects of Hinduism'.⁴⁴ Christel R. Devadawson persuasively locates the story within Hindu philosophical debate about the motives for which actions are performed.⁴⁵ This debate has its classic expression in the Hindu classic the *Bhagavad Gita*, the sacred text which was well known in the later nineteenth century, especially after Edwin Arnold's translation was published as *The Song Celestial* in 1885.⁴⁶ Right motive for action is a central theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and it is plausible that Kipling had read this key text in Sir Edwin Arnold's translation, as he owned two of Arnold's other books, *Pearls of the Faith, or Islam's Rosary* (1883) and *India Revisited* (1886).⁴⁷ In *The Song Celestial* there is an important passage in which Lord Krishna discourses on the difference between 'right', 'dark', and 'vain' action, and the 'rightful' doer as opposed to the 'impassioned' doer:

There is 'right' action: that which being enjoined —
Is wrought without attachment, passionlessly,
For duty, not for love, nor hate, nor gain.⁴⁸

Right action, in other words, is encouraged but it should be done disinterestedly rather than out of emotion. Although Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* describes the life of the man who seeks moksha [release from the cycle of rebirth] as 'steadfastly meditating, solitary/His thoughts controlled, his passions laid away', such a man is not commanded to refrain from action (52). In fact, Krishna declares that 'abstaining from a work by right prescribed/Never is meet!' (157).

In other words, the dichotomy that many critics find between action and renunciation is not present in this central Hindu text, and the further claim that

⁴³ K.C. Belliappa, *The Image of India in English Fiction* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1991), p. 89.

⁴⁴ D. C. R. A. Goontellike, *Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 42.

⁴⁵ Christel Devadawson, *Reading India Writing England* (Delhi: Macmillan, 2005), p. 78.

⁴⁶ There were other translations of the *Gita* known in Victorian times, but Arnold's was the main way in which the work entered public consciousness. It had a profound influence on Mohandas Gandhi who was introduced to Arnold's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* in London by two Theosophists. Gandhi regarded Arnold's version as the best translation in English. See Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 45.

⁴⁷ Information from <<http://www.copac.ac.uk>> [accessed 3 June 2014]

⁴⁸ Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial or Bhagavad-Gita* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1891), pp. 160–61. Further references are given in the text.

Kipling in 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' is privileging Western activism over Hindu passivity seems to me a misreading. Kipling is demonstrating in this story that release from the phenomenal world can come from selfless action as well as contemplation. Christel Devadawson makes this point when she links the story to the Hindu belief that 'deeds performed by a disinterested individual who cares nothing for reward are sufficiently meritorious to enable the latter to attain supreme bliss'.⁴⁹

Why, though, should Kipling have been interested in presenting Hindu ideas about action and renunciation in fictional form, particularly since he had conflicted views about Hinduism, as I show in Chapter 3? Enamul Karim suggests that what Kipling is most interested in here is 'the inner development' of the central character, which is formed by a mixture of Western and Hindu influences.⁵⁰ Purun Bhagat is firstly a progressive administrator, then a hermit, and finally a holy man and saviour. He is a high-caste Brahmin but not bound by ideas of caste; he avails himself of the best education that the British have to offer and becomes the enlightened and progressive ruler of a native state. His commitment to humanistic ideals co-exists with a deep commitment to his Hindu faith, a faith that eventually leads him to become a hermit and give up all material possessions. However his humane instincts are still in evidence, shown in his attitude to the animals which surround him and his deep emotional connection with the villagers, whom he dies in saving. Karim suggests that these ideas appeal to Kipling because of his deep and abiding interest in Freemasonry, which, as Kipling saw it, values spiritual growth within all religious traditions.

However, a more likely source of Kipling's interest in Hindu spirituality is the fact that he was in America during the first World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, at which the Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda spoke. Vivekananda's self-professed mission was to bring a modernised Hinduism to the West and because of the brilliance of his oratory in Chicago he attracted many disciples and much interest from intellectuals such as William James, with whom

⁴⁹ Devadawson, *Reading India*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Enamul Karim, "'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat': a Re-Examination", *Kipling Journal*, 257 (1991), 25–34 (p. 27).

Kipling was acquainted.⁵¹ Vivekananda's spirituality was centred on a devotion to the *Bhagavad Gita*, which, as I have shown, Kipling probably knew. It is certainly possible that Kipling and William James discussed Hindu spirituality, as well as Buddhist ideas, when they met in Vermont in 1895.

At the time that Kipling wrote 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' he was also beginning to compose *Kim*, and the earlier story provides an important interpretative lens through which to consider the presentation of the lama and his spiritual search. There are however significant differences between the lama and Purun Bhagat. The lama has not had a worldly career, and he has had no contact with the British Raj until he arrives at the Lahore Museum in the opening chapter of *Kim*. Purun Bhagat saves the village because of his disinterested love of humanity; the lama in his spiritual search comes to acknowledge and realise the depth of his love for his disciple Kim. It is out of love for a particular individual that the lama postpones his own enlightenment at the end of the novel.

Purun Bhagat unites within himself the best of Western activism and Hindu spirituality. The lama, though, is untouched by any Western values: he is an idealised pilgrim, scholar, and artist who humbly lives the Buddhist Way. His spiritual quest is conducted entirely within the Buddhist tradition of the search for Nirvana and his discovery of the meaning of the Bodhisattva ideal. We must now examine what drew Kipling to write about Buddhism and centre his novel on the figure of the unworldly lama.

Constructing the Lama

The relationship between Kim and the lama was central to Kipling's thinking about the novel from an early stage. In 1892, he proposed a short story to Mary Mapes Dodge, editor of the children's magazine *St Nicholas*, 'the tale of the Thibetan lama and Kim o' the Rishti'.⁵² When the proposed short story turned into a full-length novel is not known, but we do know that Kipling began working on the tale on 22

⁵¹ See Norris Frederick, 'William James and Swami Vivekananda: Religious Experience and Vedanta/Yoga in America', *William James Studies*, 9 (2012), 37–55. James includes many quotations from Vivekananda in his celebrated book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

⁵² Letter to Mary Mapes Dodge, 21 October 1892, in *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Thomas Pinney, 6 vols (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990-2004), II (1990), p. 63.

October 1892, laid it aside while he was writing the *Jungle Book*, the *Second Jungle Book*, and various short stories, took it up again in January 1896 but concluded that it would not work and that he would have to consult his father. In August 1898 he sent the draft to his father, and, as we learn from Kipling's autobiography, the two worked on it together.⁵³

Kipling's assertion in his autobiography that father and son knew 'all the persons that he [Kim] met' suggests that the portrait of the lama may have been drawn partly from life, as discussed in Chapter 1. It can certainly be argued that the lama's increasingly dominant role in the final version of the novel is due to Lockwood's influence. Margaret Peller Feeley, in her meticulous comparison of the one extant manuscript that exists of *Kim* with the published version, shows clearly that Kipling refined and developed the character of the lama as he worked. In the manuscript the lama is 'ingratiating, child-like, and incompetent', whereas in the final version he is an Abbot and a scholar, a 'dignified, capable, and highly learned person'.⁵⁴ Peller Feeley argues persuasively that the casual racism that is found in the draft manuscript probably derived from Kipling's early attempt at a novel called *Mother Maturin*, which was never published because his family disliked it.⁵⁵ It is plausible to suggest that it was his father's influence that led to 'Kipling's first sustained portrait of a non-European as a dignified, capable, and highly learned person'.⁵⁶ Although a different sphere, Lockwood Kipling admired Indian craftsmanship which he fostered during his career as the Principal of two art colleges in India. He worked closely with colleagues such as the architect Bai Ram Singh, who helped him to design the Durbar Room in Osborne House for Queen Victoria. He was unusual among British administrators and art educators in India for having genuine respect for his Indian colleagues and their skills.⁵⁷

⁵³ The information in this paragraph about the writing of *Kim* is from Lisa Lewis, 'The Manuscript of *Kim*', pp. 3-4 < http://www.kipling.org.uk/rg_lewiskim.htm > [accessed 14 February 2012]

⁵⁴ Margaret Peller Feeley, 'The *Kim* that Nobody Reads', *Studies in the Novel*, 13 (1981), 266-81 (p. 272).

⁵⁵ Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 141. The manuscript is now lost. It may have been destroyed by Kipling's wife Carrie because she disliked its portrait of low-life India.

⁵⁶ Peller Feeley, 'Kim', p. 274.

⁵⁷ See Mahrukh Tarapor, 'John Lockwood Kipling and British Art Education in India', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980), 53-81 and *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the*

However *Kim* is far more than a fictionalisation of Lockwood Kipling's reminiscences and Kipling's own memories of life in India. It represents Kipling's most sustained attempt to grapple with the realities of India's spiritual life and to try to make sense of religion as a spiritual search. In this respect he goes far beyond his father's agnosticism. Lockwood Kipling, son of a Methodist minister, was famously indifferent to religion: 'none of us, by the way, ever go [to church]', he wrote to his niece Margaret Burne-Jones in 1885.⁵⁸ His book *Beast and Man in India* (1891) attacks Hindu and Muslim attitudes to animals, and he excoriates 'the East' for being indifferent to the sufferings of animals while believing that these same animals have souls and can be reborn as human beings. He explains this apparent contradiction by claiming that the 'the vast bulk of humanity is content to mutter an indifferent acquiescence [to religious creeds]', and claims that the East is following the practices of the West, where religious faith has little influence on people's behaviour.⁵⁹

Rudyard Kipling did not share his father's indifference to religion. Generally speaking, his writings about religious faith are either hostile or sympathetic, but never indifferent. Although he could write about Hinduism in a very critical way, for instance in *The Naulahka* (1892), discussed in the previous chapter, Kipling came to have an increasingly favourable view of Eastern spirituality in the 1890s, as I have indicated. The contrast between his father's agnosticism and the lama's religious faith is brought to the fore in the opening pages of *Kim*, as the next section contends.

The Lama and the Curator

The lama is introduced into the novel initially as a pilgrim and given a precise origin and aim. As he explains to Kim, he is from the Such-zen Monastery in Bhoyital (Tibet) and wishes to see the 'Four Holy Places' of Buddhist pilgrimage before he dies (5). These are the places of the Buddha's birth, first sermon, enlightenment, and death, and they were indeed sites of pilgrimage in the nineteenth century following archaeological discoveries of traces of early Buddhist sites.⁶⁰ He comes to the

Punjab and London, ed. by Julius Bryant and Susan Weber (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ Quoted in Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 157.

⁵⁹ John Lockwood Kipling, *Beast and Man in India* (London: Macmillan, 1891), p. 400.

⁶⁰ For details see Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Lahore Museum not only to find out information about the sites to which he is travelling but also to see images of the Buddha in human form. The scene in which the lama meets the curator of the Lahore Museum, by common consent an affectionate portrait of Kipling's father, has been much analysed by critics. Most interpret the scene as a clash of cultures, in which Kipling is celebrating the triumph of Western rationalism and scientific modernity over Eastern traditions. For instance, commenting on the curator's gift to the lama of paper, pencil, and spectacles, Stanley K. Abe writes:

Implements of knowledge are central to the gifts the Curator chooses for the lama: the tools of recording (white English paper and sharpened pencils) and a superior tool for seeing, the English spectacles. The colonizer assists the lama in his search by providing the Western technology necessary to obtain truth. The lama is thus given instruction in the superior methods, that is, those of modernity and the West, for discovering and recording facts. His joyful acceptance of the gift of sight reproduces a fundamental ideological construct of colonialism, namely, that the colonial relationship provides the colonized with what they cannot produce themselves: Western rationality and technology — the tools with which to modernise.⁶¹

Similarly, Zohreh T. Sullivan sees the lama as 'a stereotypical example of the Oriental whose inadequate senses require the protection of the English who are given the control of sight', while Edward W. Said argues that the gift of the spectacles symbolises the placing of the lama 'within the protective orbit of British rule in India'.⁶² These readings give a political interpretation of the passage. If we concentrate instead on the lama and his religious quest, it is clear that Kipling presents the lama as the equal of the curator, in that the two men represent different, and complementary, attitudes towards Buddhism. The curator has collected and catalogued most of the artefacts and statues in the museum, and read English and French translations of the early Buddhist scriptures. He is knowledgeable about the attempts by archaeologists and scholars to map the holy places of Buddhism. His interest in the religion is intellectual and scholarly. He is polite and courteous to the lama, but he does not have any emotional or spiritual attachment to the Buddha, the

⁶¹ Stanley K. Abe, 'Inside the Wonder House: Buddhist Art and the West', in *Curators of the Buddha: the Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 63–106 (p. 68).

⁶² Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 93; Said, 'Introduction', *Kim*, p. 15.

statues or the places of pilgrimage. The world of scholarship, learning, and the museum is carefully contrasted with the religious devotion of a seeker after enlightenment.

The lama, on the other hand, visits the museum to try to find information that will help him in his religious search. He is profoundly moved by the sight of the Buddhist statues and particularly by the representation of the Buddha in human form. Kipling presents both the curator and the lama with some affection here, but the fact that the curator does not appear again and the focus shifts to the lama suggests that Kipling's main aim in this novel is to explore imaginatively the world of Buddhist piety rather than scholarly knowledge.

Kipling does not present these two ways of approaching Buddhist culture as antithetical but as complementary, and this is reflected in the gifts that the curator and the lama exchange. It is important that the gifts are reciprocal: both East and West have something to offer each other. The curator gives the lama pencils and paper, and a new pair of spectacles to replace his scratched ones; the lama gives the curator a pen-case (8–10). The lama already has spectacles which are 'heavily scratched' but of almost exactly the same strength as the curator's own pair. When the curator gives the lama his own pair, he remarks, 'may they help thee to thy River', showing that he respects the lama's search, although he does not know the river that the lama is seeking. The curator's spectacles, though, prove inadequate as a means to religious experience, as Kipling makes plain much later in the narrative. Just before the lama's enlightenment, when he has resisted the temptation to violence in response to the blow from the Russian spy, he tells Kim that the curator was 'in past life a very wise abbot'. Then he adds, 'But even his spectacles do not make my eyes see' (270). Abe's statement quoted above that the lama is provided with 'the Western technology necessary to obtain truth' does not consider the full force of the image of the spectacles as a tool for vision, because Abe does not consider the nature of the truth that the lama desires, which is not intellectual learning, but spiritual experience.

The lama's gift to the curator, of a pen-case, has received little attention from critics, but it is worth considering the pen-case's significance both in this scene and

in the novel as a whole.⁶³ It is described as ‘a piece of ancient design, Chinese, of an iron that is not smelted these days’ and therefore appeals to the ‘collector’s heart in the curator’s bosom that had gone out to it from the first’ (12). The curator treats the pen-case as a museum piece rather than as an object of religious significance. However for the lama the pen-case is part of his identity: ‘It is something old — even as I am’, he tells the curator (12). Functionally, the pen-case is worn by the lama to hold the pens with which he draws the Wheel of Life, the Tibetan representation of the way to Nirvana, and in fact he promises such a picture to the curator when he has found the river he seeks. A second pen-case that the lama carries, and which contains the brushes with which he paints and draws, has much importance later in the novel, when the Russian spy tears the lama’s drawing of the Wheel of Life and hits him in the face. The ‘old scar’ the Russian strikes was made when the lama was a young man, in a dispute over which of the two monks should make money from writing and selling prayers. In the lama’s past, therefore, the pen-case represented both violence and greed. Momentarily, violent impulses are aroused in the lama when he is assaulted by the Russian spy. The pen-case is both the cause of desire, because the Russian spy wishes to sell the lama’s drawing, and the means of violence. It stands as a symbol of the aggressive and covetous impulses within himself that the lama must overcome if he is to attain Nirvana. The pen-case is thus an instrument for good and evil, serving as a symbol of the destructive impulses that stand in the way of enlightenment, but also enabling the drawing of the representations of the Wheel of Life.

But as well as indicating that both men have gifts they can confer on one another, the gift of the pen-case has a further resonance. The lama is giving the curator the means, if he wishes, to draw the Wheel of Life. Symbolically, the Buddhist East is allowing the Westerner to represent a very important Buddhist idea. The curator does not appear again in the novel and does not make use of the pen-case. It is rather Kipling who sees himself as licensed to write about Buddhist ideas, constructing himself as someone who can interpret Buddhism for the West and who believes that the lama and his journey are worthy of respect, countering much current

⁶³ According to Gwladys Cox, who knew Kipling’s sister Trix in old age, there was an actual exchange of gifts between Lockwood Kipling and an ‘Indian Priest’, of spectacles and a ‘pen-holder’. Lorna Lee, *Trix: Kipling’s Forgotten Sister* (Peterborough: Pond View, 2004), p. 71.

writing on the superiority of Christianity to all other religions. Just as Kipling, the 'native-born' regarded himself as having authoritative knowledge about the politics of India, so he takes upon himself the role of presenting Indian religions to the Western world. He is a 'bridge-builder', to use the title of one of his most famous stories.

Furthermore Kipling explicitly inserts himself into the scene as interpreter of Buddhism when he examines the lama's reactions to the sculptures of the Buddha in the Lahore Museum. The lama pauses before the 'larger figures of the Greco-Buddhist sculptures' with 'open-mouthed wonder' because he is not used to representations of the Buddha in human form but is familiar with an earlier tradition of Buddhist art which is non-representational. He finally stops 'in rapt attention before a large alto-relief representing a coronation or apotheosis of the Lord Buddha' (6). The 'alto-relief' has been identified by Janice Leoshko as the Muhammad Nari Stele, one of the most remarkable pieces of Gandharan Buddhist art, which is still on display in the Lahore Museum.⁶⁴ The stele was excavated from the village of Muhammad Nari in Northern Pakistan and taken to the Lahore Museum at an unknown date. However by 1881, it was installed there and seen by the young Kipling. The scenes on the stele are described by two modern scholars:

It is dominated by a teaching Buddha seated on a large lotus in the centre [...] and various beings, two of whom hover in mid-air above his head in the act of crowning him with a wreath. [...] The central Buddha is surrounded by numerous bodhisattvas engaged in different activities, several of them grouped together. In the upper area there are also solitary bodhisattvas seated within their own pavilions, and in the top corners two meditating Buddhas emanate further standing ones.⁶⁵

Kipling conveys the affective power of this religious work of art on the lama, who is overcome by the sight of the representation of the Buddha, and 'half-sobbed' with emotion at the sight. He declares 'The Lord! The Lord! It is Sakya Muni himself', and then under his breath he begins 'the wonderful Buddhist invocation', mentioning Maya, the Buddha's mother, and Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and faithful disciple:

⁶⁴ Janice Leoshko, 'What is in *Kim*? Rudyard Kipling and Tibetan Buddhist Traditions', *South Asia Research*, 21 (2001), 51–75 (p. 51).

⁶⁵ Paul Harrison and Christian Luczanits, 'New Light on (and from) the Muhammad Nari Stele', in *Special International Symposium on Pure Land Buddhism* (Kyoto: Ryokoku University Research Center for Buddhist Cultures in Asia, 2012), pp. 69–127 (pp. 69–70).

To Him the Way — the Law — Apart
Whom Maya held beneath her heart
Ananda's Lord — the Bodhisat. (6–7)

Few critics have noted that here the lama is actually quoting from Kipling himself, from his poem 'The Buddha at Kamakura' (1892). Verses from the poem provide the introduction to the first three chapters in the novel and direct the reader to the highly sympathetic interpretation of Buddhist ideas to be found in the poem, in which Buddhism is presented favourably and in opposition to certain aspects of evangelical Christianity, as I discuss in Chapter 1. Buddhism is shown in the poem to be gentle and tolerant, as opposed to the 'narrow way' of evangelical Christianity which is full of 'zealots'.⁶⁶ The reference by Kipling to his own poem is not just a kind of intertextual witticism, but has a deeper significance. Kipling is linking the lama's sense of awe and wonder at the sight of the Muhammad Nari stele with his own emotion at the sight of the giant Buddhist statue at Kamakura as expressed in his poem, and, in the same gesture, reaffirming the importance of his own aesthetic and religious response and validating the lama's search.

The curator, on the other hand, is not moved emotionally by the art on display in the Museum. He shows the lama the fruits of Western endeavours: a photo of the lama's own monastery, the statues unearthed by Western archaeologists, and translations in English and French of the journeys of the Chinese pilgrims Fo-Hian and Hwen-Thiang, who visited India in the fifth and seventh centuries CE to collect Buddhist texts. The curator also tells the lama of the efforts by European scholars to identify the holy places of Buddhism and shows him a map of India with the holy places marked on it. Again, the lama is said to be moved: he 'bowed his head over the sheets in silence for a while' (9). The word 'bowed' indicates a prayerful attitude. Meanwhile, the curator lights 'another pipe', suggesting his willingness to wait patiently while the lama absorbs the information on the holy places that he is being shown, but also suggesting his own lack of religious feeling by the mention of the mundane object of the pipe. In this way Kipling suggests that his father's agnosticism is a limited state: he can respect but not understand the Buddhist religion, whereas Kipling presents himself as having insight into and understanding

⁶⁶ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Buddha at Kamakura', in *Rudyard Kipling: the Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 2010), pp. 75–76.

of the spiritual search of a devout Buddhist, authenticated through emotional, artistic, and spiritual feeling.

Buddhism, Non-Violence and Masculinity

Part of the reason for Kipling's use of Buddhist ideas in *Kim* is that he believes that Buddhism has largely been misinterpreted in the West and he wished to set the record straight about difficult concepts such as Nirvana. However Kipling is not setting himself up as an authority on Buddhism (unlike Max Müller, for instance, who was at pains to stress his academic credentials in his debates with the theosophist A. P. Sinnett, as I detail in Chapter 2). A more important reason is to be found in Kipling's experiences during the 1890s, the period of the gestation of *Kim*. During this time he married and had children and discovered the joy of the love between child and father. Choosing a Buddhist priest who has explicitly embraced non-violence to be the orphaned Kim's father-figure is a way for Kipling to explore the nature of manliness and fatherhood — and the conditions under which both might flourish. Kipling's whole notion of masculinity and manliness underwent refinement and change during this key decade of his life, and the novel reflects this enriching transformation in his life.

As Philip Mallet asserts, 'masculinity in the later nineteenth century seemed to many writers to be facing threats from every angle'.⁶⁷ These threats are reflected in much of the literature of the time, from gothic fictions such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), through the adventure stories of Henry Rider Haggard, to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896), which presents a young man of promise as so utterly unable to function in our present world that his little son takes the seemingly logical step of child murder and suicide.

Kipling, too, was persistently fascinated by the world of men and what

⁶⁷ Philip Mallett, 'Preface' to *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015) ed. by Phillip Mallett, p. x. For further discussions of masculinity and manliness in the Victorian period see, for example, Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880–1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

manliness requires. In his early stories written in the 1880s he explores the challenges facing young men in both the Indian Civil Service and the British Army. His portraits of soldiers in the exclusively male world of the British Army are drawn from real conversations that he had in Lahore: he does not romanticize or glorify the men that he writes about but presents them as recognisably human and fallible, 'in a way that no one had done since Shakespeare'.⁶⁸ His stories about the officers of the Indian Civil Service emphasise the stress and loneliness that these young men face. His admiration for the fortitude of men who work under difficult conditions is a common trope in writing about Empire, but less common is his emphasis on the cost of such a life, the strain and breakdown that were commonly corollaries.

The camaraderie between men who have experienced difficult and challenging circumstances is also a feature of Kipling's first novel, *The Light That Failed*, as I have indicated. The clear homoerotic undertones in the relationship between Dick and his friend Torpenhow are often associated with Kipling's close friendship with Wolcott Balestier, an American literary agent, who died suddenly in Germany in December 1891. Following his death, Kipling immediately proposed to Wolcott's sister Carrie, in a move that surprised Kipling's friends and family (and has baffled his biographers). Perhaps more important for the notions of masculinity in the novel than Kipling's apparent repressed desire for Balestier, however, is his linking of manliness with danger and war. Dick can only relate to those who have endured perilous situations as war artists, as he himself has done. In the world of the novel, such men are completely misunderstood by the metropolitan public, who want only sanitised representations of war, and can find understanding and acceptance only in each other's company.

In *Kim* Kipling presents alternatives to Dick the abused child and alienated man. Unlike Dick, the boy Kim, the 'little friend of all the world', was not ill-treated in childhood: he can go everywhere and be accepted by all groups. Far from delighting in military action, the lama aims to lead a completely non-violent life. Indeed, the lama's spiritual quest involves tracing and overcoming the roots of violence within himself so that he can attain enlightenment and become a

⁶⁸ David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 48.

bodhisattva, as I show in the next section. In *Kim*, Kipling returns to the nature of manliness in the light of his new experience of fatherhood. Indeed, the novel is ‘full of wonderful fathers’, as Lionel Trilling wrote in 1943, and of these it is the lama who is the least aggressive and most loving.⁶⁹

The Tibetan Wheel of Life: overcoming aggression

Kipling’s interrogation of the impulses to violence within men also shapes the structure of the novel. As Bruce Shaw argues, the novel, far from being ‘nakedly picaresque and plotless’ as its author claimed, is in fact structured carefully around the image of the Tibetan Wheel of Life.⁷⁰ Kipling would have known of this image both from representations in the Lahore Museum and also from L. Austine Waddell’s book, *The Religion of Tibet or Lamaism* (1895), which is a detailed account of Tibetan Buddhist practices. Shaw traces linguistic parallels between the two works, and believes that Waddell’s book is the one referred to in Kipling’s autobiography as a ‘certain work on Indian magic’ which he wanted to steal from the India Office.⁷¹

The Wheel of Life is a visual representation of some of the most important Buddhist ideas and was painted on the outside of nearly every Tibetan Buddhist temple in Tibet and India. This is the only image that the lama ever draws and Kipling’s description of the lama tracing ‘the Great Wheel with its six spokes, whose centre is the conjoined Hog, Snake, and Dove (Ignorance, Anger, and Lust)’ reflects the illustration in Waddell’s book, in which the Dove, symbolising lust or desire, issues from the Hog, ignorance/stupidity, and in turn the Snake (hatred/anger) issues from the beak of the Dove.⁷² Furthermore, the description of the tear in the lama’s picture made by the Russian spy as running from ‘the Eleventh House where Desire gives birth to the Child (as it is drawn by Tibetans) — across the animal and human

⁶⁹ Lionel Trilling, ‘Kipling’, in *Kipling’s Mind and Art*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Edinburgh, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), pp. 85–96 (p. 88).

⁷⁰ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 170.

⁷¹ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 106, quoted in Bruce Shaw, ‘The Tibetan Wheel of Life versus the Great Game in Kipling’s *Kim*’, *Kipling Journal*, 276 (1995), 12–21 (p. 16).

⁷² L. Austine Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Heffer, 1934), illustration facing p. 108. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Alan Sandison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 192. Further references are given in the text.

world, to the Fifth House — the empty House of the Senses' (262) again represents the picture in Waddell's book.

Anger is portrayed on the Wheel of Life by a snake, and an encounter with a cobra raises questions early in the novel about whether violence is an appropriate response to a dangerous creature. When Kim and the lama see a 'big cobra with fixed lidless eyes', Kim's immediate response is to look for a stick to break its back, but the lama tells him to refrain: 'he is upon the wheel as we are — a life ascending or descending — very far from deliverance' (43). The lama addresses the cobra as 'brother' and asks it whether it has any knowledge of the river that he seeks. The snake does no violence to either Kim or the lama when they pass within a few feet of it.

This incident dramatizes the lama's respect for all living beings and the Buddhist belief that all creatures are bound by the Wheel of Life until they achieve release. However, Kim has not yet learnt the reverence for life that the lama exemplifies. His horror at the snake is characterised as 'the white man's horror of the serpent' (43). The mention of 'serpent' rather than snake also resonates within the novel's depiction of the opposition between Buddhist values and Christian ones. In traditional Christian theology the serpent brings evil into the world and is to be feared. Here the snake is a fellow creature which is also seeking enlightenment, suggesting that Buddhism is a more tolerant religion than Christianity, in line with the thinking in Kipling's poem 'The Buddha at Kamakura'. The lama feels love for all creatures and condemns none.

However the lama does struggle with violent impulses within himself, impulses that he must overcome to attain Nirvana. This struggle is shown most clearly in his encounter with the Russian spy who demands that the lama sell his drawing of the Wheel of Life:

The lama shook his head slowly, and began to fold up the Wheel. The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama's grip. (242)

The ignorant Russian spy sees the lama through the lens of ethnic and religious contempt. He does not understand the significance of the Wheel of Life and thinks

the lama is simply concerned with price. The spy resorts to violence when the lama, aghast and horrified at the tearing of the picture, puts his hand on his heavy pen-case, and he strikes the 'old man full on the face'. This provokes Kim to retaliate in kind, but the main focus of the passage is the lama's horror at his own impulse to violence. He has been forced to understand the teaching of the Wheel, that 'evil in itself [...] met evil in me — anger, rage, and a lust to return evil' (252). The Russian's blow has fallen upon an old scar of the lama's, caused by fighting as a young man, as he later tells Kim. Memory of this earlier act of aggression and his encounter with the Russian spy have enabled the lama to realise that enlightenment will not come while he is in thrall to the passion of anger. He now understands through his personal experience that the passions of greed and anger and the state of ignorance are the drivers of human behaviour and as such will keep human beings tied to the cycle of rebirths. This is what the lama means when he tells Kim 'I have seen the Cause of Things' (259). It is a key stage on his path to Nirvana, enlightenment — and a long way from *The Light that Failed*'s bitter portrayal of war as the only space or stage on which male affection can be secured.

Are aggression and violence characteristics of manliness? There is certainly some ambivalence in Kipling's writing of this scene, since, after all, Kim uses force to dispatch the Russian spies and protect the lama. We find a similar ambivalence in an earlier scene in the novel in which Kim and the lama encounter an old soldier who has fought in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 on the side of the British.⁷³ He accompanies Kim and the lama along the way, reminisces about his actions in helping to rescue British women and children, and declares his pride in his three sons who are all soldiers. The lama and the soldier converse, but convey very different points of view. The soldier is proud of his military success and in response to the lama's query 'what profit to kill men?' at first defends the use of violence:

'Very little — as I know; but if evil men were not now and then slain it would not be a good world for weaponless dreamers. I do not speak without knowledge who have seen the land from Delhi south awash with blood'. (52)

⁷³ See also Erin Louttit's analysis in "'What Profit to Kill Men?'" Buddhist Non-Violence in *Kim*, *Kipling Journal*, 357 (2014), 22–29.

However Kipling does not leave the discussion at that point; nor does he endorse the soldier's description of the lama as a 'weaponless dreamer'. The soldier is wearing a sword despite the police orders that 'no one must bear weapons'. Despite his age, he is obsessed with and attached to the military life that he led but when the lama asks 'Why the sword?' the soldier looks 'as abashed as a child interrupted in his game of make-believe'. The lama urges him to leave behind his memories of military glory and to think of spiritual matters: 'Enter now upon the Middle Way, which is the path to Freedom. Hear the Most Excellent Law, and do not follow dreams' (54–55). For the lama, the dominant voice in this episode, violence is a 'game' and a 'dream'.

But the soldier's attachment to violence and the past is unchanged by his contact with the lama. On the next day on the road the soldier is still thinking of past glories and sings 'the song of Nikal Seyn before Delhi', a real ballad that was composed by a Punjabi following Lieutenant-General John Nicholson's death following the recapture of Delhi in 1857.⁷⁴ During the singing of this song the lama remains 'markedly' silent (57). He disapproves of the soldier's attachment to his sword, which represents the aggression in human beings that the lama must overcome in himself.

Edward Said sees the inclusion of the soldier who fought on the side of the British in the Indian Mutiny as an example of Kipling's imperialism, since Kipling could have chosen to include a soldier who fought against the British and thus endorsed the cause of Indian nationalism.⁷⁵ Sikh soldiers from the Punjab, north India, where Kipling had lived as a young journalist, did fight on the side of the British during the Mutiny against the soldiers of the last Mughal Empire, and so Kipling might well have encountered such soldiers during his time in Lahore.⁷⁶ However, focusing on the soldier's allegiance during the Indian Mutiny makes a political rather than a religious point. The soldier's attachment to his past memories of fighting is contrasted with the lama's espousal of non-violence, and a difference is drawn in this novel between those like Kim and the lama who advance in spiritual understanding and those who, like the soldier, remain attached to destructive emotions.

⁷⁴ *Kim*, ed. by Sandison, p. 297.

⁷⁵ *Kim*, ed. by Said, p. 25.

⁷⁶ See William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 207.

Kipling thus presents two views of violence. The old soldier looks back to the glory days of fighting for the British; the lama repudiates all use of force. We cannot say that Kipling, who was an enthusiastic supporter of war with Germany in 1914, is endorsing a pacifist position here. It is rather that he is raising the question of what being a man really entails, and how much qualities of love, tenderness, and nurturing are appropriate features of masculinity. The despair of *The Light that Failed*, in which the protagonist willingly dies in the front line of battle, has given way to a much more nuanced examination of the varieties of manliness and the valorisation of a gentle, kindly, and nurturing male in the person of the lama.

The River of the Arrow and the Nature of Love

Throughout the novel the lama is presented not only as a man who is struggling with the violent impulses within himself but as someone who is learning the importance of love and the true nature of a bodhisattva. The Buddhist word bodhisattva denotes an individual on the path to full Buddhahood or awakening (the term preferred to enlightenment). The task of the bodhisattva is ‘to compassionately help beings while maturing his or her own wisdom’.⁷⁷ Classic Buddhist texts outline the path of the bodhisattva in terms of the practice of moral virtues along with the cultivation of wisdom and insight into the causes of things.⁷⁸ Buddhism makes a distinction between Nirvana, which can be attained in this life, and Parinirvana, the completion of Nirvana, which comes at death for the awakened individual. It is important that an individual who has glimpsed Nirvana may choose to remain in the phenomenal world (samsara) to help other sentient beings to achieve the same state. The modern scholar of Buddhism, Rupert Gethin, elucidates the figure of the bodhisattva:

Any person who has attained Nirvana does not remain thereafter forever absorbed in some transcendental state of mind. On the contrary he or she continues to live in the world; he or she continues to think, speak, and act as other people do — with the difference that all his or her thoughts, words and deeds are completely free of the motivations of greed,

⁷⁷ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 121.

⁷⁸ The historical Buddha achieved Nirvana, awakening, following his meditations under the Bodhi-tree, but postponed his final release from the cycle of rebirth and suffering in order to teach his disciples about the nature of reality, and attained this release only forty years later when he died.

aversion, and delusion, and motivated instead by generosity, friendliness, and wisdom.⁷⁹

Thus ideas about Nirvana, spiritual enlightenment, and the bodhisattva, the person who acts mercifully in the world, are closely connected in the classic Buddhist texts. The idea of the bodhisattva was familiar to Kipling, mainly from its representation in Buddhist art, such as the Amaravati sculptures which he would have seen in the South Kensington Museum and the works of art in the Lahore Museum. The Muhammad Nari stele [stone slab] in the Lahore Museum contains representations of bodhisattvas in the sense of figures attending the historical Buddha who are themselves on the path to enlightenment. As detailed in Chapter 1, Kipling had also seen and been affected by statues at the Nikko River in Japan in 1889 which represented Jizo-bosatsu, who is a compassionate bodhisattva thought to save the souls of dead children.⁸⁰ ‘The Bodhisattva’ is a title frequently applied to the historical Buddha, Prince Gautama, on his road to enlightenment, and it also refers to those devout Buddhists following the Buddha’s way to find release from the cycle of rebirth and to figures of compassion such as Avalokiteshwara, a being very important in Mahayana Buddhism.⁸¹ W. W. Rockhill (1854–1914), the American explorer and diplomat who was a correspondent of Kipling’s, describes Avalokiteshwara in the following terms, in his book about Tibet, *The Land of the Lamas* (1891): ‘the Merciful One, whose one great self-imposed mission is the salvation of all living creatures from the miseries incident to sentient existence’.⁸² Representations of Avalokiteshwara were displayed in the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum and so were known in Victorian Britain. Thus the Buddhist concept of the spiritual being who acts on behalf of others was known in Victorian Britain through images and books by travellers such as Rockhill.

Other textual sources may also have been important for Kipling’s portrait of the charitable and kindly lama. In 1876 the explorer Clements Markham (1830–1916) edited accounts of two earlier encounters between British traders and Tibet.

⁷⁹ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 75.

⁸⁰ See *Kipling’s Japan: Collected Writings*, ed. by Hugh Cortazzi and George Webb (London: Athlone Press, 1988), pp. 155, 162.

⁸¹ The Chinese equivalent is the female goddess of compassion Kwanyin.

⁸² William Woodville Rockhill, *Land of the Lama: Notes of a Journey through China, Mongolia and Tibet* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), p. 327.

George Bogle (1746–1781), a close associate of Warren Hastings, visited Tibet in 1774 and the Sinologist Thomas Manning (1772–1840) was the first Englishman to enter Lhasa in 1811. Bogle was encouraged by Warren Hastings not only to form trading links but also to record details of the culture and customs of Tibet. According to his own account, Bogle formed a friendship with the Panchen Lama, the highest ranking lama after the Dalai Lama, whom he described in favourable terms as being possessed of ‘Christian charity’ and ‘generosity’.⁸³ Bogle gives the Panchen Lama the title of Teshu Lama, the title used by Kipling for the lama in *Kim*. Laurie Hovell McMillin traces Bogle’s description of his relationship with the Teshu Lama in detail and argues that we see here echoes of the lama’s relationship with Kim; however, there is no evidence of direct influence of Bogle’s book on Kipling, and Markham’s book is not listed as one of the ones owned by the curator in the Lahore Museum.⁸⁴

The prevailing view of Mahayana Buddhism, in which the idea of the bodhisattva originates, was largely hostile. Often compared unfavourably to Roman Catholicism, writers criticised the ritual and practices found in northern Buddhism, especially any deviations from the ‘purer’ Buddhism found in Ceylon, which was considered more authentic. Furthermore, Victorian writings about Tibetan Buddhism were also hostile. L. Austine Waddell calls the religion of Tibet ‘a distorted form of Buddhism’ and believes it is associated with devil worship. Buddhism is characterised as ‘essentially a doctrine of sheer negation and despair’ and the Buddhist as ‘selfishly seeking his own individual salvation’.⁸⁵ Thus Kipling refines and counters prevailing images of the bodhisattva as being part of ritual and priest-ridden Mahayana Buddhism and of Tibetan Buddhism as being akin to devil worship.

However more important even than these places of pilgrimage is the lama’s quest to find the ‘River of the Arrow’. The lama is not just a pilgrim, for the holy places of Buddhism which he actually does visit do not provide him with the

⁸³ Clements R. Markham, ed., *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa* (London: Trubner, 1876), p. 132.

⁸⁴ Laurie Hovell McMillin, ‘Enlightenment Travels: the Making of Epiphany in Tibet’, in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. by James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 49–69 (p. 58).

⁸⁵ Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet*, pp. 15, xiv, xv.

religious experience that he seeks. He is on a quest for an object, the River of the Arrow, whose location he does not know. *Kim* can therefore be classed as a quest narrative, but one that works in very different ways from that popularised by Kipling's friend Rider Haggard.

The reference to the river has largely baffled critics, but, in my reading, the River of the Arrow is as significant for the novel's meaning as it is for the lama. It stands for an unattainable and illusory goal. Only when the lama has realised that the river has no physical existence can he appreciate that true spiritual fulfilment is to be found not in the discovery of a physical object or in pilgrimage to a particular place but in his loving postponement of Nirvana for the sake of his disciple Kim. Kipling locates meaning and value squarely within human relationships, rather than in a particular holy place.⁸⁶

The lama has to learn for himself what reality the River of the Arrow has. At first he links it with traditions from the life of the Buddha. He tells the curator of the Lahore Museum the legend of the Buddha shooting an arrow in an archery contest to win the favour of the girl he loved, a legend which is dramatised in Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. Other books in the Lahore Museum associate the shooting of the arrow with the bubbling up of a well. For instance, Samuel Beal's translation of the Chinese pilgrims Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun's account of their travels to India mentions a 'fountain of water, which, in after generations, was used as a well for travellers to drink at'.⁸⁷ The footnote notes that 'two fountains of water gushed' from the place where the arrows fell. *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha*, a translation of the life of the Buddha from Chinese sources by Samuel Beal, also describes one of the arrows that the Buddha shot as making 'a spring of water, which is called to this day the Arrow Well'.⁸⁸

Initially, therefore, the lama understands the river as a physical object for which he and Kim can search, and identifies it with an object mentioned in ancient texts. He tells the curator that he will indeed visit the holy places of Buddhist

⁸⁶ This may be one reason why Kipling did not interest himself in Sir Edwin Arnold's campaign to restore Bodh-Gaya to Buddhist control, mentioned in Chapter 1.

⁸⁷ Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 2 vols (London: Trubner, 1884) I, p. xlix.

⁸⁸ Samuel Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (London: Trubner, 1875), p. 90.

pilgrimage but that he will seek for the river everywhere he goes, for ‘the place is not known where the arrow fell’ (10). As the lama and Kim go on their journey the lama questions everyone they meet about the whereabouts of the river, but he is never satisfied with their answers. He rejects the suggestion made by several people that they meet on their travels that his sacred river is Gunga [the Ganges], the holiest river of Hinduism. While Kim is at school for three years the lama travels all over India to ‘follow the traces of the Blessed Feet’ and realises that ‘there remained nothing more in life but to find the River of the Arrow’ (165). For the first time, though, this search is linked to his relationship with Kim:

It was shown to him in dreams that it was a matter not to be undertaken with any hope of success unless that seeker had with him the one *chela* appointed to bring the event to a happy issue. (165)

The word ‘success’ suggests that the lama is still focused on the outcome of the process, in other words the finding of the river. However as his love for his chela Kim grows the finding of the river as such becomes less important in his thinking. He begins to have confidence that ‘the River will break from the ground before us’ (193). He now understands the river will also be a source of enlightenment for Kim: ‘when we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion — at my side’ (212). As he and Kim travel on the road and practise the Dharma, or Buddhist Way of Life, the lama’s ‘River troubled him nothing’ (213). In fact, he comes to realise that his guidance of Kim has caused him to acquire merit and will actually help him towards Nirvana (261).

When the lama finally attains a vision of Nirvana it is evident that there is no holy river: the Sahiba tells Kim that the lama has tumbled ‘into a brook’ (276) from which Hurree Babu has rescued him, and the lama himself tells Mahbub Ali that he was ‘dragged from no river’ but found Nirvana ‘by Knowledge’, by which he means knowledge of the causes of suffering and rebirth (284). He tells Kim, ‘I pushed aside world upon world for thy sake’ before he descended into the ‘river’, where the waters closed over his head. By attaining knowledge the lama is convinced that he has also gained freedom for Kim from the Wheel of Life when Kim dies:

This very night he will be as free as I am from the taint of sin — assured as I am when he quits this body of Freedom from the Wheel of Things [...] He is sure of Nibban [Nirvana] — enlightened as I am [...] Let him

be a teacher; let him be a scribe — what matter? He will have attained Freedom at the end. (284, 285)

The lama feels that his search is complete with the realisation of what love can achieve for his disciple, Kim. He has entered a state beyond individuality and beyond time and space:

As a drop draws to water, so my Soul grew near to the Great Soul which is beyond all things. At that point, exalted in contemplation, I saw all Hind [...] I saw them at one time and in one place; for they were within the Soul [...] By this I knew that I was free [...] And I meditated a thousand thousand years, passionless, well aware of the Causes of all Things.

The lama's experience of seeing 'all Hind [India]' at one time and place refers to the Buddhist belief that the phenomenal world has no reality in time and space, a thought which is also conveyed by the repetition of the word 'thousand'. The lama is presented as passing into a state which is beyond the temporal world, a 'passionless' state in which all human emotions are overcome. However the key point of this passage is that the lama does not remain in that exalted state. He is pulled back to earth by love for his disciple Kim:

Then a voice cried: 'What shall come to the boy if thou art dead? And I was shaken back and forth in myself with pity for thee; and I said, 'I will return to my *chela* lest he miss the way'. (288)

The lama's withdrawal from 'the Great Soul' is not presented in negative terms, but entirely by means of images of vitality, creation and fruitfulness:

As the egg from the fish, as the fish from the water, as the water from the cloud, as the cloud from the thick air; so put forth, so leaped out, so drew away, so fumed up the soul of Teshoo Lama from the Great Soul. (288)

These images of creation suggest the dawning of a spiritual insight: the lama has finally realised the relation between his love for Kim and his religious calling, and that the search for the river is not a search for a physical place. He tells Kim:

So thus the Search is ended. For the merit that I have acquired, the River of the Arrow is here. It broke forth at our feet [...] Son of my Soul, I have wrenched my Soul back from the Threshold of Freedom to free thee from all sin — as I am free and sinless. (289)

The celebrated closing sentence of the novel makes clear the lama's joy at having postponed his own enlightenment for the sake of Kim: 'he crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won Salvation for himself and his beloved' (289).

Thus the novel concludes on a note of fulfilment. The lama has experienced Nirvana, but has postponed it so that he may remain in the world for his disciple, Kim. The lama has realised his vocation as a bodhisattva, a Buddha in waiting. Lockwood Kipling's illustration of the end of the novel, included in its first publication in *Cassell's Magazine*, emphasises this idea. It shows the lama in the position of a Buddha, his hands in a praying position and the Wheel of Life outlined behind him. Shortly before this passage, Kipling's text emphasises this point, explicitly linking the lama to the statues in the Lahore Museum, to indicate that the lama is finally enacting his role as a bodhisattva:

He [Kim] peered at the cross-legged figure [the lama], outlined jet-black against the lemon-coloured drift of light. So does the stone Bodhisat sit who looks down upon the patent self-registering turnstiles of the Lahore Museum. (287)

At the end of the novel, therefore, Kim and the lama have discovered their mutual dependence and love for one another through a series of religious experiences and their insights into the meaning of the Wheel of Life. The lama has come to realise that his love for Kim does not hinder him from following the Buddhist Dharma, as he had thought earlier in the novel, when he told Kim that affection for him 'was not part of the Way' (121). Rather, it is precisely his love for the boy that enables him to attain the state of the bodhisattva. The lama has seen stone representations of bodhisattvas in the Lahore Museum. Now he is able to realise, through a transcendent religious experience of the importance of love, what becoming a bodhisattva entails. The lama has also come to understand that the search for the river was illusory. It is only by freeing himself from anger and truly understanding the Wheel of Life that he can achieve enlightenment. The river turned out to be a 'brook' from which the lama was rescued, signifying that it had no physical existence but is rather a state of mind. The lama is indeed on a quest, but not for a physical object. This realisation is not rooted in transcendental ideals but rather in

human affection. The fulfilment of his quest is his understanding that Nirvana is no abstract state but connected with the deep love that he has for his disciple, Kim.

In this way Kipling takes a specifically Buddhist notion, that of the bodhisattva who postpones his own enlightenment, Nirvana, for the sake of all mankind, and gives it a universal and human significance, which is rare in Victorian culture. Kipling is presenting himself as the bridge between East and West, as someone who knows the true meaning of these unfamiliar ideas and can present them to a Western audience, just as in politics he always fashioned himself as the person who understood the realities of politics, whether in India or Britain.

The Jataka Tale of the Two Elephants

The importance of love in the novel as an inseparable part of the fatherliness of the lama and his spiritual growth is particularly emphasised by Kipling's fashioning of a tale about one of the previous lives of the Buddha, a genre known as a Jataka. The lama tells the Jain priests who have given him a home in their temple for three years a Jataka about an aged elephant, fettered with a leg-iron, which nurtures a young elephant calf for thirty-five years in spite of the pain it is suffering. The young elephant grows in strength until one day it notices the half-buried leg-iron and 'in the twinkling of an eye-lash abolished the ring, saying "the appointed time has come"' (166). The lama explains the meaning of the story:

So the virtuous elephant who had waited temperately and done kind acts was relieved, at the appointed time, by the very calf whom he had turned aside to cherish — let all listen to the *jataka* — for the elephant was Ananda [the Buddha's cousin and disciple], and the Calf that broke the ring was none other than the Lord Himself. (166)

A Jataka tale is a genre that was well known in Victorian England. In the Jataka stories, as the modern scholar Peter Caracciolo describes them, the Buddha 'supposedly recounts his own exploits in previous incarnations when as compassionate Bodhisattva he was not yet fully enlightened'.⁸⁹ They are tales that

⁸⁹ Peter Caracciolo, 'Buddhist Teaching Stories and their influence on Conrad, Wells and Kipling: the Reception of the Jatakas and Allied Genres in Victorian Culture', *The Conradian*, 11 (1986), 24–34 (p. 24). Buddhist frescoes depicting the tales were exhibited in London. Particularly important were reproductions of the Ajanta cave drawings, which were displayed in the Crystal Palace in the 1860s, and the Amaravati sculptures which

teach the readers about the historical Buddha's role to enlightenment through aeons of past time as he tries to build the strengths, resources and experience ready for his final rebirth. Through these stories the Buddha also teaches others who follow in his path towards enlightenment. The Jatakas are unique within Indian tradition: as Sarah Shaw says: 'they are the only collection of stories in the world in which the development of one character is tested not just through the events of one lifetime but of hundreds'.⁹⁰ In the stories the future Buddha experiences life as all kinds of animals, as human beings of different classes and even as a god. In these lifetimes he is shown as fulfilling the 'ten perfections' of Buddhism, ethical qualities such as generosity, wisdom, and patience. Practising these virtues was felt to be key to becoming a bodhisattva and so the stories have an important teaching function in showing those who come after the historical Buddha what ethical qualities to practise to follow in his path.

One of these perfections is metta, loving-kindness, a virtue that needs to be practised by those on the path to becoming a bodhisattva.⁹¹ The story told by the lama in *Kim*, therefore, seems at first sight to be a retelling of a traditional Jataka tale about metta, specifically about the mutual love between the future Buddha and his faithful disciple Ananda, and applied to the relationship between Kim and the lama.

However research into the subject matter of the Jataka stories reveals that although there are tales about the practice of metta, and tales involving the exploits of elephants, there does not seem to be any previous story of this kind that Kipling is drawing on. Kipling appears to have fashioned the text himself, using the traditional model of the Jataka tale. Christel Devadawson is one of the few critics to take note of Kipling's invention of this Jataka story. She argues that though Kipling in many

were shown first in the South Kensington Museum and then in 1880 transferred to the main staircase of the British museum. Monographs on Buddhist art which contained representations of Jataka tales by authors such as the noted archaeologists James Fergusson and Sir Alexander Cunningham also began to appear during this period. In addition there were over a dozen translations of these fables published between 1859 and 1896, some in scholarly editions, and some for children. For instance, the scholar Rhys Davids, the noted authority on Pali Buddhist texts, published *Buddhist Birth Stories* in 1880, and the Sanskrit scholar E. B. Cowell edited several volumes of translations of the Jataka stories which were published from 1895 to 1907. The tales were retold for children in Joseph Jacobs, *Indian Fairy Tales* (London: D. Nutt, 1892).

⁹⁰ Sarah Shaw, *The Jatakas: Birth Stories of the Bodhisatta* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. xx.

⁹¹ An example of a Jataka which teaches the importance of metta is the Maccha Jataka, in which the future Buddha causes rain to fall on dry land for the benefit of all. Sarah Shaw, *The Jatakas*, pp. 60–65.

ways keeps to the form of the Jataka tale he does not seem to have taken an actual example but has rather invented the tale himself:

The use of the animal world to point a moral within the fable, the stress on deliverance, the formulaic repetition, and closing peroration are all present. Yet the tale itself appears not to exist in the contemporary standard editions of the Jataka.⁹²

Why, then, has Kipling invented his own Jataka?⁹³ To answer this question, which Devadawson does not address, we must look more closely at the placing of the tale in the novel and its relation to the theme of the lama's spiritual search.

The tale emphasises not only the mutual love and care expressed by the old elephant and the young elephant calf but also the theme of liberation. The leg-iron that has fettered the old elephant and caused him pain can be interpreted as symbolising the Buddhist belief that all human beings suffer in this life and that enlightenment, or Nirvana, is the only release from the suffering of constant rebirths. Previously the lama has been searching for the river that heals, or liberates, configuring it as a physical object. At this point in the novel he begins to realise that his search must include the recognition of his love for his chela, Kim. Thus the Jataka story emphasises a key theme of the novel, namely that the path to Nirvana necessarily involves love for others, and this is the way of liberation. Kipling composes a new Buddhist Jataka to show that he has the knowledge and authority to take an ancient Eastern type of religious tale and make it his own.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have positioned Kipling's portrayal of the lama and his search for enlightenment against dominant interpretations of Buddhism in the nineteenth century as pessimistic and nihilistic. Kipling uses his very detailed knowledge of key Buddhist concepts, such as the bodhisattva, Nirvana, metta and the Wheel of Life, to interrogate notions of masculinity, while his nuanced presentation of violence in the novel indicates a new direction in his writing, following his joyful experiences of fatherhood in the 1890s and his sense of the importance of love in human

⁹² Devadawson, *Reading India*, p. 87.

⁹³ We know from Kipling's autobiography that he invented at least one more Jataka story, which his father thought was 'otiose' and had to be taken out. This story has not survived.

relationships. Kipling also presents himself as the person who ‘knows’ about Buddhist spirituality and can interpret it to the West, just as Sir Edwin Arnold had done with the life of the Buddha in *The Light of Asia*. Kipling’s interest in religious experience and his wish to enter into the mind and feelings of a devout Buddhist priest may also be traced to his knowledge of the writings of William James and conversations with James about Hinduism and Buddhism. Above all Kipling’s construction of a kindly, tolerant and devout father-figure is a way for him to reconfigure his past and assuage the memories of the cruelty of his religiously intolerant foster-mother.

Kim is a novel that can be read in many different ways, as an adventure story, as a text that reflects colonialist assumptions, or as a religious novel, as I do in this thesis. This reading of the novel, and the importance of the Buddhist ideas represented there, resonates with a response to Kipling’s book from the Burmese politician and practising Buddhist Aung San Suu Kyi. In an article in the *Sunday Times* in 1996 she revealed that she had read *Kim* four times, the last when she was under house arrest. When she first read the novel, she ‘approached Kipling with an anti-colonial antenna searching out his imperial prejudices, of which there was no dearth’. But on subsequent readings of the novel, she came across ‘what seemed to be uncharacteristically tender streaks in a spectrum of overweening British Empire values’. Reading the book again under the enforced conditions of house arrest, she saw the novel in a different light: ‘These streaks [of tenderness] appeared to me as an essential part of Kipling’s genius. There was a recurring preoccupation with what Buddhists would term metta (loving-kindness)’.⁹⁴ This appreciation of deeper, more spiritual values in *Kim* which emerges on rereadings of the novel was also experienced by the Archbishop of Canterbury’s envoy Terry Waite, who read *Kim* again after many years while imprisoned in solitary confinement in Lebanon. At first, coming back to *Kim* simply reminded him of reading the novel as a boy and enjoying the adventure story. But reading it again slowly and with concentration in his cell, Waite now saw it as a novel ‘striving for contemplation and inner peace’, which helped him ‘develop and strengthen [his] own inner values’ in its ‘convincing

⁹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1996, p. 7.

expression of the mystical'.⁹⁵ Both Aung San Suu Kyi and Terry Waite reread *Kim* in conditions of extreme physical and emotional hardship and found in it an expression of deep and universal spiritual values. My analysis of the novel has shown the context of Kipling's sympathetic portrayal of such values in the inner life of a devout Buddhist monk and, furthermore, that his respect for Buddhism and its spiritual practices is rare, if not unique, in Victorian culture and still resonates with many readers today.

⁹⁵ Terry Waite, Address to the Annual Luncheon of the Kipling Society, 1996, *Kipling Journal*, 279 (1996), 10–19.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of understanding different Victorian views of Buddhism in order to appreciate the context of Kipling's most extended fiction, the novel *Kim*. A wide variety of approaches to the religion existed in nineteenth-century Britain: scholarly interpretations based on translations of early Buddhist texts, outright hostility from missionary writers, admiring accounts of the religion and its moral code, and theosophical attempts to subsume the religion into its own distinctive world-view. The figure of the historical Buddha and the concept of the noble eightfold path as an ethical blueprint excited admiration. Other ideas found less favour: the search for Nirvana was frequently associated with nihilism and pessimism, playing into anxieties associated with the fin-de-siècle; the doctrine that there is no stable self was thought to be baffling and incomprehensible, and to conflict with the fundamental Christian belief in the immortality of the soul. Tomoko Masuzawa makes the striking assertion that Victorian Buddhism was characterised by 'a series of bipolar characteristics', a 'jumbled series of striking extremes':

Buddhism came to be viewed [...] as at once alien and familiar, in character rigorously philosophical and indulgently ritualistic, serenely ethical and diabolically corrupt; its adherents sagacious and stultified.¹

However disparate the judgements expressed about the religion, though, there is one assumption in common to almost all of these writings: the idea that a religion should be interpreted and understood through its own historic texts rather than its actual practice in different countries. The 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible that emerged in the nineteenth century sought to demonstrate the literary relationship between the New Testament gospels in an attempt to discover which writings were earliest and therefore (supposedly) reflected a more authentic and purer Christianity. Similarly, Victorian scholars examined original Buddhist manuscripts, and concluded that the Theravada [Southern] branch of Buddhism contained the texts that were closest in time to the religion initiated by the historical Buddha and was therefore truer to his thoughts and ideas. Constructing Buddhism from what they took to be its original sources, therefore, scholars made the judgement that the practices of Mahayana or Northern Buddhism were a corruption of an original 'pure' Buddhism.

¹ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 121.

These ‘Protestant’ presuppositions about the primacy of the text meant that actual Buddhist practice in the East was felt to be of little interest: the rituals and worship of idols found in Mahayana Buddhism were thought to have degenerated from the original principles of the historical Buddha and therefore did not fit the narrative of a religion that was in its purest form deemed to be an ethical code with few supernatural elements.² This narrative of degeneration (which was of course a common one at the end of the nineteenth century) was connected by many Protestant writers with the ways in which Roman Catholicism had, in their estimation, corrupted gospel Christianity. Because current Buddhist practice was of little concern compared to an analysis of written texts, there was no attempt to found a sangha [Buddhist community] in England in the nineteenth century, and very little interest in the practice of meditation that so fascinates modern-day adherents of the religion.

These points have often been made by scholars writing about the reception of Buddhism in the nineteenth century. This thesis aims to prove something different, that Kipling’s best-known and most popular work, *Kim*, should be considered an original contribution to the nineteenth-century literature of Buddhism in that it counters some of these commonly-held views of the religion. Unusually for writings of the time, Kipling bases the presentation of Buddhism in the novel not on texts that he had read but on actual monastic practice and his own emotional response to Buddhist art both in Lahore and in Japan. Indeed, in its sympathetic imagining of the spiritual life of a Tibetan Buddhist priest, the novel contested many contemporaneous views of Tibetan Buddhism as idolatrous. Similarly, Kipling opposes interpretations of Nirvana and the lack of a stable self as nonsensical or absurd. Uniquely in Victorian writing, Kipling presents both ideas positively in that he uses them to trace the growth in spiritual understanding of both the lama and the boy Kim. Kipling also utilises the concept of the bodhisattva, an idea that was known but little discussed, to characterise the lama’s spiritual growth and realisation

² For the Protestant presuppositions in nineteenth-century discussions of Buddhism see Martin Bauman, ‘Culture Contact and Variation: Early German Literature and the Creation of a ‘Buddhism in Protestant Shape’, *Numen*, 44 (1997), 270–95; Douglas Brear, ‘Early Assumptions in Western Buddhist Studies’, *Religion*, 5 (1975), 136–59; Gregory Schopen, ‘Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism’, *History of Religions*, 31 (1991), 1–23.

that he must postpone his enlightenment for love of Kim. Although it is difficult to prove Kipling's intentions in writing *Kim*, it can be argued, as I do here, that Kipling uses these difficult and abstruse ideas as an innovative way of making sense of an individual's spiritual journey within a non-Christian tradition.

Kim is often deemed unique among Kipling's writings in its positive and joyous affirmation of Indian life. Unlike many of his Indian stories, the novel has no frame narrator to add distance to events and no employment of an ironic voice. In tone and subject matter, it is quite unlike Kipling's previous novels, too. I have argued here that it is productive to read *Kim* as connected to *The Light that Failed*, Kipling's first novel. The later work presents a positive affirmation of Indian society and its exploration of the possibilities for the spiritual growth of the individual, reversing the pessimism of *The Light that Failed*, which presents a world of despair and failed relationships where the only remedy for suffering is to seek one's own death. My contention is that the two novels are imaginative explorations of Kipling's own counterfactual lives — the alternative lives that he could have led. Many critics have explored the effect on Kipling the man and the writer of his traumatic early experiences in Southsea. I have considered this experience in a new context, as a formative influence on Kipling's feelings about Buddhism, a religion he experiences as a kind of polar opposite to the evangelical Christianity that he had been exposed to as a child. This furnishes one explanation for the emotional connection that Kipling records himself as feeling to images of the peaceful Buddha, which represent for him a vivid contrast with the intolerant and cruel kind of Christianity that he experienced in his youth.

Thus, in my reading of the novel the Buddhist lama takes centre stage. When *Kim* was first published the portrait of the lama garnered admiration, notably from Henry James, who wrote to Kipling in 1901: 'I find the boy himself a dazzling conception, but I find the lama more yet — a thing damnably and splendidly *done*. Bravo, bravo, lama, from beginning to end'.³ In a similar vein, the citation for the Nobel Prize for Literature, which Kipling was awarded in 1907, also singles out his portrait of the lama for praise:

³ *Henry James: Selected Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 334.

In the delineation of the Buddhist priest, who goes on a pilgrimage along the banks of the stream that washes away sin, there is an elevated diction as well as a tenderness and charm which are otherwise unusual traits in this dashing writer's style.⁴

The lama here, though, is hailed as an aesthetic achievement, and I have wanted to demonstrate that he is also, and importantly, a religious and ethical one. It is this that has been largely lost in readings of *Kim*. Indeed, the version of *Kim* compiled by Robert Baden-Powell in his influential *Scouting for Boys* (1908) concentrates solely on the novel as helpful for training a future colonial agent and omits the lama altogether. With an increasing emphasis on Kipling's political views as the twentieth century progressed, the lama came to be ignored as a character or interpreted as representative of the forces of unreason and passivity that justified the energy of the colonial powers. Ironically, some modern readings of the lama as passive unwittingly echo Victorian constructions of Buddhist priests as indolent.

Post-colonialist criticism, following Edward Said's 1987 edition of the novel, focused important attention on Kipling and his imperialist attitudes. However, these sometimes presupposed attitudes to India that were not substantiated by contextual study. Indeed, the Indian scholar Harish Trivedi has recently emphasised the importance of attending closely to the text in his meticulous consideration of the notes in Said's edition, which, according to Trivedi, contain numerous factual errors which were quickly identified as such by his students.⁵

To understand the force of Kipling's presentation of Buddhist ideas by attending closely to the text, and to explore why they are at the heart of what makes *Kim* a special novel, has been my aim in this thesis. Recently the treatment of Buddhism in fiction, for long largely neglected by critics, has received welcome attention in the volume *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American Literature* (2013).⁶ The chapters cover a wide variety of writers, from Olive Schreiner in the nineteenth century, to the Beat Poets in the 1960s, and Maxine

⁴ <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1907/press.html> [accessed 14 November 2016]

⁵ Harish Trivedi, "'Arguing with the Himalayas'? Edward Said on Rudyard Kipling", in *Kipling and Beyond*, ed. by Caroline Rooney and Kaori Nagai (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 120–43.

⁶ *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century Buddhist and American Literature*, ed. by Lawrence Normand and Alison Winch (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Hong Kingston's 1976 novel *The Woman Warrior*. However *Kim*, which might have been thought to merit its own chapter, is limited to one sentence in the introduction, in which Lawrence Normand quotes Abdulla Al-Dabbagh, the post-colonialist critic, as saying that *Kim* turns away from the 'sympathetic identification [with the East]' of Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and takes up a 'colonialist and antagonist' position.⁷ The limitations of this view of Kipling have been pointed out by Sarah Shaw in her generally favourable review of the volume. Shaw writes:

It is Kipling [...] who demonstrates, above all writers of the period, proof of the very contact with the cultures, practices, and local participation with Buddhist ritual and life that Normand detects as missing in Anglophone literature until well into the twentieth century. [...] *Kim* is a complex work, where the Buddhist *vinaya* [rules for living], storytelling and compassionate humour of the lama disarm all colonialist assumptions, including those often ascribed to the author.⁸

Shaw identifies here two subjects for further discussion to help rectify what she feels has been missed: the varied treatments of Buddhism in nineteenth-century writing, and the way that Kipling uses such ideas, particularly within *Kim*. These are the topics which this thesis has explored, and the tasks that it has aimed to fulfil.

The reading of the novel that I provide here, then, gives due weight to the way that its religious ideas are given imaginative expression, and in this way fits in with recent studies of the links between Victorian literature and religion. Many other avenues remain to be examined, however. Further explorations of the treatment of Buddhism in nineteenth-century popular fiction, particularly in best-selling authors such as Henry Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli, would build on J. Jeffrey Franklin's discussion in *The Lotus and the Lion* and extend analysis to less well-known authors as well. Another important strand of enquiry suggested by my research concerns Kipling's religious views, which changed and developed after World War 1; though he did not write about Buddhism again, his view of Christianity became increasingly more nuanced, as seen in stories such as 'The Gardener' (1925) and 'The Church that was at Antioch' (1929). And more generally, an exploration of the ways in which other world religions, particularly Islam, were constructed in Victorian

⁷ Lawrence Normand, 'Introduction', *Encountering Buddhism*, pp. 1–22 (p. 9).

⁸ Sarah Shaw, 'Review', *Buddhist Studies Review*, 31 (2014), 146–51 (pp. 147–48).

writings is an area that has been under-researched and would shed interesting light on nineteenth-century religious and social concerns.

Kim is Kipling's best-loved work, which readers have always enjoyed and cherished for its loving evocation of life in India and its depiction of the affection between the Buddhist lama and the boy Kim. My reading of *Kim* has given a new impetus to discussion by emphasising the religious context of the novel and the way in which Buddhist ideas are utilised and brought to vivid life in narrative fiction. My aim here has been to better understand the attraction of *Kim*, for myself and for the novel's many enthusiastic readers. It has also been my aim to contribute to the current reassessment of Kipling the writer by emphasising his seriousness about religious matters and the originality of his presentation of Buddhism in this, his most famous novel.

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